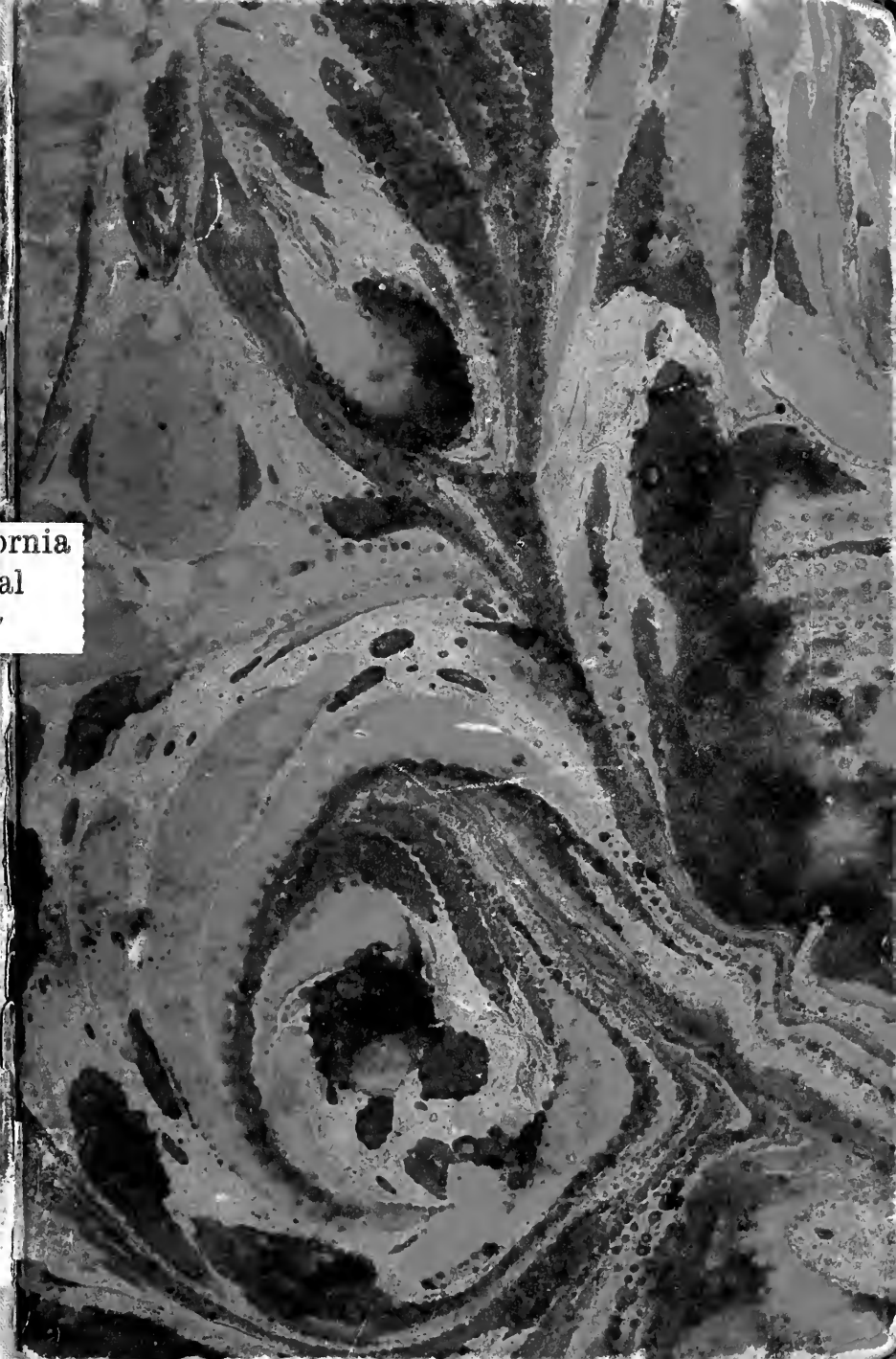
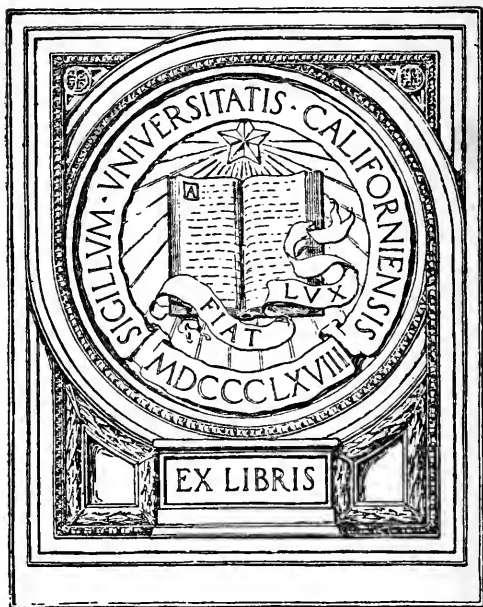


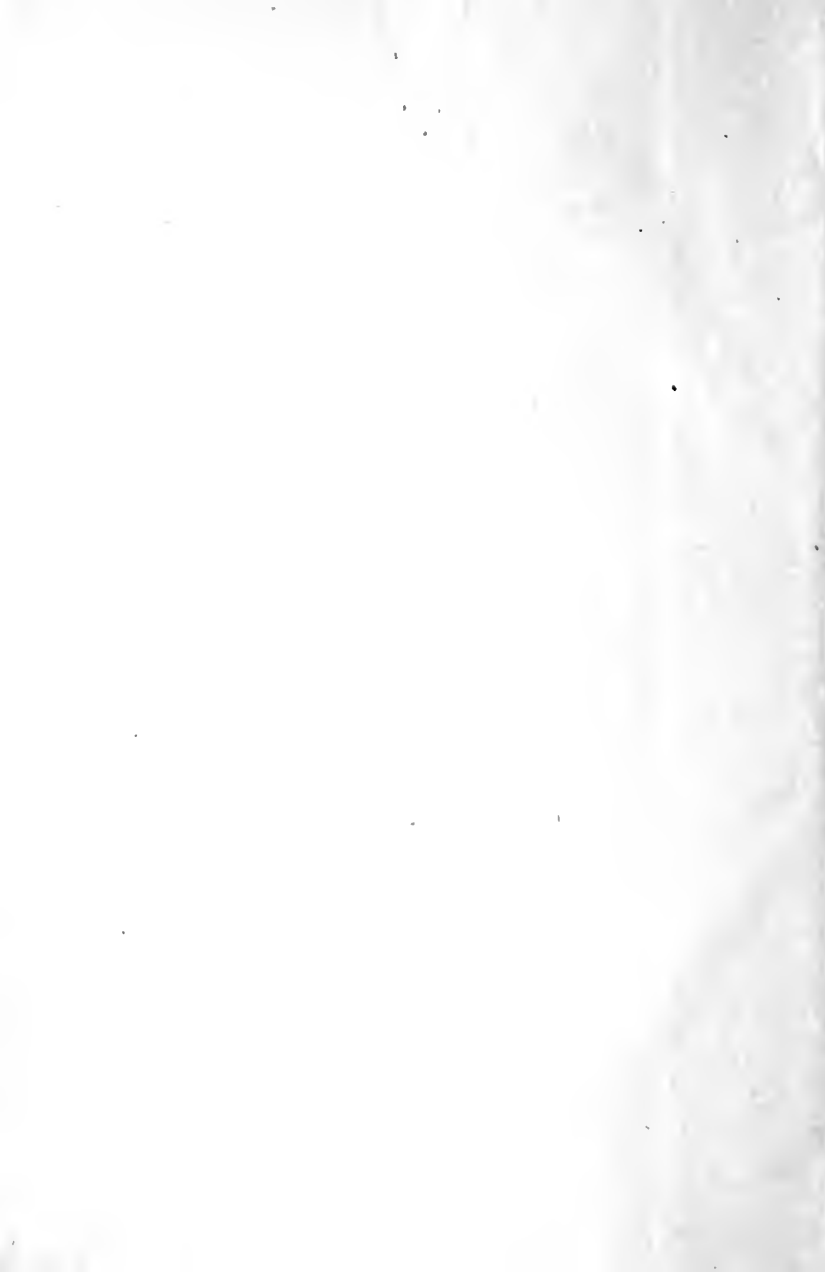
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The Vineyard

BY
JOHN OLIVER HOBBS



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THE VINEYARD

"He beholdeth not the way of the Vineyards."

CHAPTER I

"But from the light and fiery dreams of love
Spring heavy sorrows and a sleepless life,
Visions, not dreams, whose lids no charm shall close,
Nor song assuage them waking."

Atalanta in Calydon.

"I TELL you I won't stand it! It is not to be endured! It is the most unfair thing I have ever heard of!"

"Don't get excited. That's no use."

"But, I ask you, what right has my father to cripple me? The capital is next to nothing as it is, and to tie it up in this outlandish way is madness—ruin! It places me like this."

The speaker pressed his two wrists together as though they were handcuffed, and, with despair darkening his face, he paced the small room as though it were a cage. He was handsome, magnificently built, and seven-and-twenty; his gait showed the effects of military drill, and his bearing the influence of military associates, yet he lacked the stamp of a

regular soldier ; his voice was most agreeable, yet it had a provincial harsh intonation which broke out occasionally, giving the effect of a second tongue interrupting his speech ; his dark eyes were direct and candid, yet he had the habit of closing them from time to time, either to conceal their expression or to collect his thoughts, which often strayed. As he looked at his companion, a tall spare man of forty, who was poring over an ordnance map, his desperate glance softened into docility.

"It's the most unfair thing I have ever heard of," he repeated, but with less vehemence : "the most unfair. Did I at any time ask for much?"

"That's what I ventured to tell your father. That is why I have got the sack after fifteen years of devoted service !" said the spare man, whose nervous hands trembled, and whose restless eyes belied his languid manner. "I made up my mind on the spot that I would put you on your guard. You are not supposed to know the contents of your father's will : now I have prepared you for it."

"Yes, I am prepared for it, and, so far, I thank you ; but that won't make it easier for me to get on with him."

The little room in which they were talking had a small oval table in the centre, a davenport in the corner, and at the side an old-fashioned mahogany sideboard protected by a cover of American cloth and set out with a large locked tea-caddy of Chinese

inlaid work, an empty cut-glass flower-vase on a filigree electro-plated stand, and a polished brass tea-urn which was never used. There was a canary in a green cage ; a stuffed duck in a case. On the walls there were smooth portraits in dingy oils of stout matrons in caps and black satin, and pink old gentlemen with whiskers and gold watch-chains ; the horsehair sofa and chairs were adorned with coloured antimacassars, and the three books on the one shelf near the fireplace were bound volumes of *The Quiver* for the early seventies of eighteen hundred. It was not easy to pace this narrow apartment, so Federan, after uttering a few more exclamations of anger and astonishment, sat down by his other companion—a woman, shabbily dressed, who sipped a glass of port wine and nibbled a piece of seed-cake. She had lifted her veil to her worn eyebrows, and, painfully interested, she stared at the man with the map ; her absorption was so complete that she tried to drink the cake and bite the wine. Federan, who was observant, noticed this, but he had no heart to smile. Besides, he knew the woman and her vague, moon-struck ways too well.

“It’s a shame,” he said ; “a cruel shame. What shall I do, Coolidge ? ”

“You must have irons in the fire,” said Coolidge. “The old man’s paralysis may linger on for years. Take time by the forelock. That is why I called your attention to these facts within my knowledge.”

"You mean that business on the Franton estate. I hate risk, however ; I don't believe in it."

At moments Federan could show obstinacy, but he loved peace, and one of the things he enjoyed most was losing an opinion which oppressed him or placed him in disagreement with any man. Want of faith in a project, no matter how unsound, was in itself an acute distress to his sanguine nature. Coolidge, who had watched him grow up, played with his optimism as an expert angler would with a young trout.

"The Franton estate is a pretty large one—four hundred acres," said Coolidge. "It belongs absolutely to Miss Tredegar. There is coal on that land—*coal!*"

"But," said Mrs. Coolidge, speaking for the first time, "do you think that Miss Tredegar could be got to sell it? They tell me she changes her mind fifty times a day!"

"That is because she has not men to deal with," replied Coolidge, annoyed at the interruption. "She is shut up with a parcel of women, and they are all fools together."

Federan looked out of the window at one of the most charming gardens in that part of the country. It was famous for its lilac trees, which were now in full bloom. There was also a large dovecote, and he could see the doves flying in and out of their small habitations. He loved flowers and colour, and the country in spring and summer-time. He was a

solicitor's son, and he had formed what are known as excellent business habits ; but just as he found it hard to doubt he found it difficult to hate, and while he never allowed himself to confess his intense impatience under business matters, he had, he knew secretly, no taste for such things and no skill in dealing with them. Still, as he lacked imagination, he had never been able to decide what line of life or what possible career would have suited him better. He was discontented—not because he was ambitious, not because he was actually dissatisfied with his lot as lots went, but because the routine of his days irritated him by its monotony. His anger of ten minutes ago had already passed : he was beginning to wonder whether he had not made perhaps too much fuss. Well housed and well fed, he had enough to maintain a decent appearance ; he kept a couple of horses and a trap ; he hunted. He began to think that he could be happy on next to nothing if the lilacs would only remain for ever in flower, and the warm Whitsundays might last all the year round. He wondered how Coolidge could sit studying the map when the chairs on the lawn looked so comfortable and the cooing of the doves made one drowsy. Nevertheless, the business habit was in him, and he answered his friend :

“The question is, would Miss Tredegar sell the place at the market value?”

“Of course, that's the question,” said Coolidge ;

"that's where you have to show your gumption and diplomacy."

"She has wanted to sell the place for years," replied Federan, "but you know what women clients are. The moment they get an offer they don't want to accept it."

The garden gate was opened by a young girl in a white dress, who carried some books in a strap and a large blue parasol. She crossed the lawn without looking in at the window and disappeared. Federan blushed deeply, and pretended to brush a fly from his forehead.

"There's Miss Sussex," said Mrs Coolidge; "she's got back earlier than usual from school."

Federan stood up and looked in the glass over the fireplace; he had almost convinced himself that the imaginary insect had stung him.

"The worst of it is," he said, "everything worth having costs money. You can't stir without it—you can't get what you want. People say 'Gather the roses while you may.' I'd gather them fast enough if I could see them. But where are they? When you find them they have to be bought and paid for."

Meanwhile the girl in the white dress had looked on the hall table for letters, found none, and gone upstairs to her small study in the attic. It was so high that she seemed, there, to be living in the branches of the trees—far above the doves, yet still a long way from the stars.

Jennie was the daughter of a certain Sir Fortescue Sussex, the fifteenth and last baronet of his race. His father before him had impoverished himself by contributing too heavily to the Conservative Party funds—in the hope, it was said, of obtaining a peerage. Sir Fortescue succeeded at the age of twenty-five to the claims and the debts; he married for love the fifth daughter of a scholarly vicar; a post was found for him in the Foreign Office, where it was the work of two earnest officials to keep him excusably employed.

Always well dressed, always good-looking, always courteous, and always agreeably stupid—"straight, but a fool,"—it was a surprise to his small circle when he died suddenly of over-anxiety about his work. His work? when did he work? what did he do? He died, nevertheless, because he took the business of Imperial England too much to heart. He had, it seemed, great ideas which he could not formulate, and immense ambitions for which he knew himself unfit. Lady Sussex, assisted by a friend who was also a Fellow of Balliol, settled down in her small house in Chelsea to the self-imposed task of writing his life and editing his letters. The volume, when finished, was to be called *Sunt Lacrymæ Rerum: a Memoir of F. S.*, because she herself thought Latin dignified, and the deceased gentleman detested publicity. Five years passed: the book was not finished, but Lady Sussex married the Fellow of Balliol, who accepted an appointment in Australia, where the bride was called

plain Mrs Denton, and considered an admirable woman for being known as Lady Sussex in brackets only. Jennie was passionately fond of her mother, who was lovely, plaintive, accomplished, sweetly silly and unassailably chaste; much as she loved her one child, she loved the idea of a protector still more—she could not live alone, and she was unable to feel that her gifts from God were conscientiously employed in the society of women friends and the companionship of her daughter.

“Mamma is too young and much too beautiful to have a grown-up girl,” Jennie saw, and admitted. She refused, therefore, to accompany the bride and bridegroom to Australia; she remained in England to finish *Sunt Lacrymæ Rerum*, and read for the B.A. degree of the University of London. Several relatives had suggested that she might teach, or become a journalist, or, best of all, get a secretaryship. One second cousin—a widowed duchess, not the mother of the heir, not rich, not influential in London—was nevertheless the great lady of Cumbersborough, where she lived in an old Grange and painted little pictures in oil, mostly of sunsets. The Duchess had never troubled to see Jennie, but she recommended her strongly for the post of English mistress at a select private school for the daughters of the nobility and gentry at Franton. This institution was prosperous because it was connected by an electric tram with Cumbersborough, where delicate persons of import-

ance were often ordered for their health and the sea air. They took furnished bungalows and sent their youngest children to Mrs Marblay's seminary.

Miss Sussex, who was engaged on the strength of her introduction, received seventy pounds a year for her services and a percentage on the dancing class—which, under her supervision, proved more popular than the lectures on the Napoleonic epoch. She lived as a paying guest with the most reluctant Miss Leddles, who also consented to receive her on the strong representations of her Grace, which amounted, locally, to a command.

"We can't offend the Duchess," said Miss Daisy. "Miss Sussex, you see, is a very near relative of hers."

It occurred to the malicious and Radical and un-received of the neighbourhood that some accommodation might have been found for Jennie at the Grange. This plebeian murmur, penetrating, as such coarse whispers will, to the most exclusive sanctuaries of Cumbersborough, caused a real uneasiness. And, by all the rules of loyalty, the few who were admitted to be on terms of something approaching intimacy with the Duchess, were loud in protestations that they feared her action would never be fully understood by the world at large. The Vicar, however, who had the nicest perceptions of what one owes to oneself, pointed out that the suggested arrangement "would never do," and the impenetrable mysterious-

ness of the phrase in no way detracted from its finality or its immediate acceptance by the well-bred.

Jennie was very pretty—too pretty, one would say, to be studious. Her appearance, indeed, had been a serious shock to everybody—from the Duchess downwards. She had the rich blush and the glad brown eyes and the red-brown hair, which mean splendid bodily health: her willowy figure, her slender waist, shapely dimpled hands and small feet were cast in the coquette's mould. As she took off her hat, she sang, in a thrilling, emotional voice, "Under the Deodars," from *The Country Girl*, the score of which stood, much worn by use, on the desk of the cottage piano near the window. The bookcase by her bedside contained popular editions of Ruskin, Thackeray, Rossetti, Swinburne and Keats: Ouida's *Two Little Wooden Shoes*, Miss Broughton's *Red as a Rose is She*, and *Not Wisely but too Well*. These all had an appearance of being in constant use. Her writing-table had a small mahogany revolving stand, which contained abridged Greek, Latin and French dictionaries, *Le Père Goriot*, *Illusions Perdues*, Jebb's translation, with notes, of the *Antigone*, a cheap text of Plato's *Republic*, and a school edition of Terence. She kept, by the bottles of red and black ink, a delightful miniature, in the manner of Lawrence, of Lady Sussex at seventeen. It was the girl's one grief that she could never hope to resemble this ineffable mother—with the perfect Greek nose and

the amazing hair—her own. There were three picturesque hats on the top of the chest of drawers, and several coloured gowns hanging on hooks upon the door. She unloosed her book strap, and corrected, with curious diligence, for more than an hour, a collection of small children's compositions on the subject of Charles I. She placed marks and comments in red ink at the end of each exercise, and had just finished her task as the clock struck six. Then someone from the garden below threw a pebble at her window. Laughing, she looked out, and showed no surprise at finding Gerald Federan standing there.

"Time!" said he—"time! My aunts have not come back. Why two aged spinsters should attend mothers' meetings is a mystery to me. But I want my tea, and I am sure you want yours."

"I am coming," she answered. She ran down the stairs at full speed, and went into the small room where Federan and the Coolidges had been not long before. Federan was already standing at the tea-table.

"Two lumps of sugar, or one?" said he, as she entered. He felt suddenly embarrassed, and he felt glad to have something to say when she came in.

"One, please," said Jennie; and, as her heart was beating uncomfortably, she went to the window, leaned out, and sighed: "How beautiful the lilacs are!"

"Yes," said Federan, "the garden is lovely. It can make one forget the house and this appalling room. I often wonder how you can stay here."

"I wanted to be quiet. You see, I must work for that examination. The school is small; I don't get overtired during the day, and I have my evenings free for reading."

"It seems strange," said the young man, "that a girl your age should care so much more about work than play. That's one of the reasons why I admire you—your character, I mean. You don't mind my saying so?"

"I like to be encouraged," said Jennie, shyly. She took her accustomed place at the tea-table, and lifted her eyes to his with the caressing defiance of a woman when she is certain that she has nothing to provoke which would not be altogether agreeable.

"I was getting rather cynical—especially about girls—just before you came," said Federan. "Life seemed something like words without any music—till I met you. A man has friends—any amount of friends, and he can enjoy himself. I have had my share of fun as well as another, and I can throw myself, heart and soul, into anything that's lively. But you want more than liveliness as you go on in the world. You know all about me, don't you?"

"I know that you went to South Africa."

"I wanted to remain there—it's a white man's climate, and no one is narrow-minded. I came back

because of my father's bad health. Can you tell me my lines?" He held out his hand, which was sunburnt and badly scarred: nevertheless, it was an artist's hand—not the hand of a fighter or a plodder. "What about the life line?" he asked.

"It has crosses on it. The head line is wonderfully clear."

"I am glad of that. And the heart?"

"The heart is . . . very kind."

"Nothing else?"

"Very impulsive."

"That is true. Nothing else?"

He drew a little nearer, and their shoulders touched.

"Very fickle," said Jennie, with seriousness.

"Your one mistake," said Federan. "And look again! Does anyone come into the heart?"

"I can't see in this light," said the girl, moving away.

"I can see," said Federan.

But Jennie went to the window once more, where she stood motionless, watching the shadows on the lawn.

"Have you noticed how the whitethorn has come out in the last two days?" she asked presently; "the trees are covered with blossoms."

"I am not thinking about the trees. I don't believe you are, either!"

He was looking very handsome, and he had an

audacity of manner which seldom fails to stimulate the feminine spirit.

"If I am not thinking about the trees, what should I be thinking of?" she asked.

She felt his arm slipping round her waist, and, reddening, she turned away with such delightful grace that he could not be sure he had received a repulse. But he did not venture so near again.

"I want you to look at me," he said; "the blossoms may be pretty, but I am more deserving! Somehow, the first time I saw you—"

"How it poured with rain! We had to wait in the church porch, and I was sorry I wore my oldest hat!"

"We had a good opportunity to talk, because we were chaperoned by Aunt Daisy, who is not only deaf, but also a little blind. In these propitious circumstances, I felt we were not strangers at all."

"I had the same feeling. It was as though we had a great deal to speak about, though nothing to say! We seemed to understand, and then—"

"Well, what else were you going to say to me?"

By this time the whole sky had changed: a green mild light had come over it, the trees were looking darker, and some reflection of the sunset fell upon the purple of the lilacs. The pony trap, containing the two Miss Leddles, rattled up to the gate, and the stable-man, rolling down his sleeves, ran out from

the kitchen, where he had been watching the maid peeling apples for the Sunday pudding.

"They have come back," said Federan. "Isn't that always the way?"

But the girl went down the pathway to meet the late arrivals.

"Dr Rench stopped us," called out the elder Miss Leddle in a cross tone: "I hope you didn't wait for tea?"

"We dawdled over it," said Federan, shortly; "we have eaten nothing."

Miss Leddle, who was tall, lean, and upright, turned a keen glance from one to the other.

"I sha'n't attend any more meetings," said she, with an air of extraordinary decision.

CHAPTER II

“Who hath given man speech ? or who hath set therein
A thorn for peril and a snare for sin ?”

Atalanta in Calydon.

THE Miss Leddles were incapable of sitting down in their best gowns, mantles and bonnets to their evening meal. Complaining loudly of the unexpected delays which disturbed the decent orderliness of life, they went to their bedrooms, which were on opposite sides of the first landing, and proceeded to effect what is called a change. Miss Leddle had just resigned the majesty of a black silk in favour of a brown cashmere, and substituted a plain comb for two jet ones, when her nephew tapped at the door and walked in.

“I have had a call from Coolidge,” he said : “he has come down for the Bank Holiday, and I am wondering whether you could put him up for the night.”

Miss Leddle frowned. She had never been able to forgive her dead and plainest sister’s marriage, but she took a ferocious pride in Gerald, who, she considered, resembled herself. His faults were encouraged on the

ground that the poor boy could hardly be different in view of his mother's insipidity ; his virtues were extravagantly overpraised because they were supposed to be the fruit of Miss Leddle's own watchful care, unceasing prayers and elevating influence. To frown upon him was painful, especially as it called up a very sullen expression on his face.

"I don't care for Mr Coolidge," she said : "your father dismissed him while you were away, but he did not give his reasons."

"Then why do you take it for granted that he must be in the wrong ? He has been a good friend to me, and if I could arrange this meeting it would be worth my while. I don't want favours, however, from anybody."

He seldom wanted anything else, and no one was better aware of this than his aunt. But she liked to keep him deeply obliged to her. At the word "favour" the lines of her prudent mouth relaxed.

"You don't understand, dear. Any friend of yours is welcome, of course."

"Then do try and arrange it. It is only for a couple of nights, at most."

"It's against my judgment," she said, "but I will do it."

"Dear old pet !" he exclaimed, and went away whistling, while the grim spinster muttered self-reproaches under her breath. She was not one who could enjoy her own folly.

“What’s the matter with Gerald?” asked the younger Miss Leddle, known as Miss Daisy. She had heard the young man on the staircase, and now, fastening her alpaca bodice, she stood on the threshold of Lydia’s room with the anxiety of a Court favourite on the door-mat of a royal apartment. Would her reception be less cordial than usual? She had two little prominent teeth which touched her lower lip and intensified her air of thoughtful meekness. There is a meekness which is wholly unconscious. Miss Daisy knew that the earth was hers by inheritance—if merit and the gospel promise were not in vain. Her complexion was still soft; her gentle grey eyes still kept some of the innocent tenderness which, as a little girl, she had felt for dolls; human beings she had always feared, and the solitary living creature she had ever loved was a cow. Had she not first become acquainted with that animal as a newly-born calf, she would have feared her also.

“Shut the door! Gerald wants Coolidge here for Whitsun,” said Miss Leddle. “I can’t bear the man. The more I see of men the more I dislike them. They upset everybody.”

“So many have never been the same since they returned from South Africa,” replied Miss Daisy, who, being mild, heard all the village gossip, and, being intelligent, had gained a scientific, if impersonal, knowledge of the masculine character. “They have come back excited,” she went on; “they have got

new, go-ahead ideas. They always say, while they are away, that they long to be home, but after the first day or two they are unsettled and want to be off. Let him have his Coolidge."

"What will people say? Does it look well? It may mean a quarrel with James. James would not understand our receiving his discharged clerk as a guest."

"We need not tell James," observed Miss Daisy.

"No; that is true."

"James is often very crochety. Besides, Coolidge may not be the best friend in the world for Gerald, but he is safer than Miss Sussex. She is flirting with him and unsettling his mind."

The two maiden ladies looked long, earnestly, and fondly at each other.

"I am sorry we took Miss Sussex in as a boarder," added Miss Daisy. "Gerald never used to come and see us very often, and now, all of a sudden, he finds there never was such air as the air here."

The momentary agreement between the sisters perished at a suggestion so unflattering to Miss Leddle's sway over her nephew.

"You are quite wrong," she said crossly. "James being ill and unable to attend to business, it stands to reason that Gerald has to come over here and see the clients. He is perfectly welcome. He told me himself he has got an appointment to-morrow at the Manor; and as for Miss Sussex—"

“She is with Gerald in the dining-room. Do you hear them laughing?”

Peal after peal of fresh, clear laughter—a man’s shout and a girl’s rippling mirth—formed a sort of symphony with the hoarse notes of the staircase cuckoo-clock hooting the half-hour. Both of the middle-aged women felt a sharp pang of jealousy, and realised that Jennie was an intruder, a disturbing element in the joyless household. For the first time, probably, in their lives, they spoke in unison: “We don’t want her. She must go.”

A love of young people is not common in elderly persons. Real sympathy with youth is a rare and touching quality, which depends on one’s imagination, but even more on one’s experience—and less on one’s experience of happiness than on one’s experience of difficulties and disappointment, for the people who are kindest to the young are usually those who have had sorrow. The Miss Leddles had missed the spells and magic of existence, and its tragedy had passed them by: the sameness of their days had given them placid constitutions, and the squalid adventures of their impecunious neighbours had made envy, or any desire, of courtships out of the question. Had they ever read, had they ever fed their souls with romantic dreams, they might perhaps have longed for a more profound knowledge of life; but they kept in close touch with the crude realities of village domesticity, uncouth wooings, husbands out of work or sick, ailing

children, crowded cottages. The men of the district, moreover, were either their social inferiors or so much above them that they had never received any sentimental advances from the sex which they invariably described as "the opposite."

Marriage viewed thus held nothing to attract the well-to-do Miss Lydia and Miss Daisy, and the flirtation between Jennie Sussex and Federan was the solitary affair of the kind which had ever caused them, in the character of spectators, the least touch of chagrin. Jennie came from the great city of London; at Franton there was no other girl with such a pretty face, such a symmetrical figure, such alluring ways. It was impossible to dislike her; nor were the Miss Leddles women who detested beauty and charm because they themselves lacked both. But beauty and charm alarmed them—they knew nothing of such elements—and they had a superstitious dread, a prophetic distrust, of power manifested on the lines of witchcraft.

"That lass is a witch," Miss Liddle had declared more than once.

And indeed, when the two sisters entered the dining-room that evening and found Jennie singing French ballads to a guitar in the dusk, they might have been excused for thinking her a most unsuitable addition to the select society of an obscure parish. The song was harmless enough—"Il était un berger"—but it sounded very wicked in Miss Lydia's ears.

Jennie's eyes were flashing, and Gerald, fascinated, was watching them as a bird watches a light.

"I have a message for you, Jennie," said Miss Leddle, taking her own arm-chair at the head of the table. "Dr Rench wants you to go out to Franton Manor."

"Why?" asked Jennie, greatly surprised.

"To brighten up Miss Tredegar. They say she is moping up there, sick of books, sick of her garden, sick of her life generally. She does not care for her mother, and this makes the poor lady the more determined to keep her away from everyone else. But Dr Rench says that she can't go on as she is."

"I might go on Saturday afternoon," said Jennie, who, having planned to accompany Federan to a gala that afternoon, took great pleasure in making it appear still undecided.

The young man showed his pique by remarking only that, as the road to Franton Manor was long, his dog-cart was at her disposal.

"Poor Miss Tredegar," said Miss Leddle: "she has never been the same since some boating accident. It seems to have destroyed her nerves, and she has fallen into a melancholy."

Gerald concealed the inward interest he took in the discussion, and asked, half yawning: "I suppose she has been crossed in love?"

The sisters thought this suggestion scarcely respectful; it conveyed a slur, in their opinion, on Miss

Tredegar's moral character. They dared not look at each other, and Miss Daisy flushed deeply.

"You forget that you are speaking of a lady!" said Miss Leddle, in a severe tone.

"Can't real ladies love?" said her nephew.

No one spoke after that, and when the aunts had finished their meal, which they made with studied slowness, Federan, wishing them a short good-night, left the room. Jennie had been in sympathy with him; he had felt the incentive, the solace, and the commendation glowing under her downcast eyes, and the struggle between the old and young forces of that household was now declared. Although Jennie brought out her school-books, and the sisters played Halma till bedtime, all three were sad and absent-minded. Miss Leddle had to read more Psalms than usual before she could sleep, and Miss Daisy, who always arranged her locked cupboard on Saturday nights, took less pleasure than usual in contemplating her treasures. These consisted of a number of china ornaments, a box of brooches, a packet full of bits of lace, and a bunch of blonde curls (tied with blue ribbon) which had been cut from her own head when she had scarlet fever at the age of nine. These blonde curls represented the soul and the existence Miss Daisy might possibly have enjoyed but for the force of circumstances. That particular evening she was ashamed of them—she knew not why. They clung to her cold, skinny fingers; when she held them against her fore-

head they fell over her eyes, and she looked artificial—almost like the noisy women of the county town on market days. She restored them to the chocolate-box lined with silver paper in which they were kept.

“I shouldn’t fancy myself with a fringe,” she murmured: “I’d look so fast!”

Federan, meanwhile, had struck out into the high-road on his way to the “Eight Bells” Inn, where he knew he would find Coolidge. Being a man of indolent and reluctant critical faculties—a constitutional defect which often passes for patience—he did not become despondent on the subject of his aunts’ provinciality. From early boyhood he had accepted them, without wonder or complaint, in the great scheme of the universe, and he would as soon have attempted some reconstruction of the planetary system as any active revolt against the prejudices of Miss Lydia and Miss Daisy; he would as soon have wondered why grass was green rather than violet as why the Miss Leddles were excellent rather than pleasant women. So kind and yet so unlovable were these blameless ladies, that if they ever performed a good work they did it so thoroughly that those who might have felt tempted to follow a less perfect example became discouraged; they kept the standard of worthiness, as it were, too high, and their deeds of charity, like the creations of artistic genius, spoilt the market for the moderate achievements of less resolute souls. No one wished or hoped for any alteration in

the Miss Leddles ; on the other hand, no one wished or hoped to resemble them. "How tiresome they are !" muttered Gerald, and then he put them from his mind.

It was a warm, starry night, sweet-scented and serene. The young man would have enjoyed a walk with Jennie, and, as he marched along, he had a lonely feeling—for he was one who found no pleasure in solitude, and nothing but perplexity in meditation. Moreover, his senses demanded some tie : it might be idle, it might be absorbing, it might be dangerous, it might be merely sentimental—it had to be, that was all, or he became morose, full of foreboding gloom, listless and uneasy.

"Gerald must always have some woman in his heart !" his father would complain, with that bewilderment at sentimentality which one finds in those who married young, for good, but perhaps not sufficient, reasons. Human love is not a single and simple impulse, but an emotional force of innumerable complications : there are a number of causes which go to produce that restlessness of temperament which demonstrates itself in brief caprices, in attachments without faith, in affections without endurance. It may be nature working in disguise ; imagination, in some cases, makes the disguise more important and more powerful than the primitive instinct, and it often happens that the pursuit and study of individuals is more pleasing than the concentration enforced by

the despotism of a great passion. Ties, for instance, in the case of Federan were never bonds: easily made and broken, they were to him the little tragedies inseparable from the life of a young man who was at once romantic and ineligible. Everyone knew that he could not afford a wife; he had never proposed to any girl, although he had been fond enough of several, in the course of his adventures, to have drifted into matrimony with any one of them on, roughly, seven hundred a year. But he had something under three hundred, paid irregularly; this kept him sober in action even when his chivalrous desires would almost have passed for the courage which comes from self-confidence and strength.

"What is the use?" he would say at the hours of tearful parting. "My dear, what is the use?" His dear would sob; he himself would turn pale and remain haggard for days. "This is life," would be his next word of comfort.

He was now deeply interested in Miss Sussex, and, whereas he had always before been able from the fond beginning to face the sad farewell, he now shrank uneasily in his clothes, and frowned, and sighed, and beat the wayside hedges with his walking-stick at the idea of any break with this new friend. He was not without hopes that she might care for him, but what could he offer her? The philosopher may be delivered from the oppression of facts by losing himself in his own ideas, but an ordinary man will think only when

he must, and thought to him—so far from being the anodyne for egoism, is self-revelation at its plainest. Federan could not enjoy the emotions and moods of love, because he was driven to consider the uncompromising sobriety of an empty purse.

The parlour of the "Eight Bells" was a small room with pictures of Derby winners and engravings of the county noblemen on its walls. Coolidge was sitting there, with a glass of whiskey-and-soda by his side, smoking a cigarette and reading the morning paper.

"So you have come?" he said.

"Of course," replied Gerald: "you were going to tell me more about that scheme."

"Oh, well," said Coolidge, pulling his hat, which he constantly wore, over his eyes, "I have given you the tip. There is coal on the Franton estate, and I can introduce you to the backers—dummy backers, some of them. We don't want a whole lot in the concern—three sound men of business who will have enough common sense not to meddle—and the whole thing is plain sailing. Just you get the land."

"But suppose there isn't any coal," said Gerald: "what then? We shall have a white elephant on our hands: no one could pretend we could do anything useful with it."

"But I tell you," said Coolidge, with a little more animation, "I have a copy of Paxton & Grainger's report."

"Then why don't they take it up themselves?"

"Because their hands are too full as it is, and they never work in a hurry. They are keeping it up their sleeves. Why did Lord Hambourn have the expert down at his place? A report is getting about that there is coal. *Coal!* And you can look on without risking a penny! What are you made of?"

"I will turn it over in my mind. Of course, it may be a tremendous thing. I only wish I could work it without a syndicate."

"Ah, that would be the ideal arrangement, but it cannot be managed."

"I am not so sure."

"Well, if it comes to that," said Coolidge, picking his words and watching their effect under an assumed carelessness, "it depends on the price Miss Tredegar will accept. There is your aunt's seven thousand, which could easily be re-invested, and there are several little odd sums more or less under the control of the firm."

Coolidge's method in managing the son of his former employer was based on very close observation of the young man's temperament. There was a certain perversity in him which made him reluctant to take any step or to recommend one strongly to others: in fact, he never knew how little he wished to do a thing until someone else particularly urged him to do it. The secret, therefore, of getting one's way with him was to drive him in an opposite direc-

tion. Coolidge had only to affect carelessness over any project in order to have it carried out, even with great difficulty, by his admiring friend.

"After all," said Coolidge, lighting another cigarette, "you had better not mix in the affair. Responsibilities don't suit you. To be candid, I am rather sorry I have told you as much as I have. These speculative ideas amuse me a little, merely as ideas. You do not suppose that I would want you to carry them out. I would even say, for God's sake, don't!"

"But I want to carry them out," said Federan. "I am very grateful for your suggestion."

"It looks," said Coolidge, in his odd drawl, "as though I wanted to interfere and meddle with your private affairs."

"Not at all," said Federan, hastily; "pray don't think so. I want you to be interested in my affairs. I want you to know about them—no one could advise me so well as you."

"No, no, no—I would rather not," said Coolidge. "I shall never forgive myself. The thing came before me, and I passed it on to you without realising all it might lead to."

"I will do anything you say," exclaimed Federan impetuously—"anything!"

Coolidge still murmured, "No, no," but he left Paxton & Grainger's report on the table.

"May I have this?" said Federan.

"You had better burn it," said Coolidge: "far better."

"You haven't confidence in me," said Federan, much hurt. "You don't think I should have the patience to see the thing through."

"Why do you want to make money?" suggested Coolidge. "I am sure I don't know why I went on as I did this afternoon. It was all theoretical. Take my word for it, the happiest lives are led by those who fear nothing, know nothing, and want nothing. As for toiling and moiling to get a little more money, it is rather low—degrading, in fact. If I had not a wife," here he sighed deeply, "well, my life would not be what it is. But you are a single man: you have only to please yourself."

"But," said Federan, "I want to get more out of my life than I get at present. I think I could: why shouldn't I try?"

"Ah, that is another point," said Coolidge: "another point altogether."

"It is not for me to set the world right," said Federan. "One man going against the whole modern movement will simply make an ass of himself. It is only cutting yourself off from your friends to stand apart."

"Still," insisted Coolidge, "it is not the ideal thing," and his eyes filled with tears.

Federan felt immensely sorry for his friend, and remembered his wife and his large family and his

sordid difficulties. He regarded Coolidge as a rather great sort of man, the victim of circumstances.

"You have had to do it," said he.

"Oh," said the other, with an ironical laugh, "I have had to do a good many things."

"Well, what is good enough for you is good enough for me," said Federan, heartily.

"Better leave it alone," said Coolidge, getting up: "far better."

But he knew that he had gained his point, and, being wise, he decided to end the discussion. When one human being attains, by over-persuasion or management, the apparent mastery of another, it should always be remembered that the persuaded one has a willingness for some motive, either secret or expressed, to be led. The weakest individual has a lurking strong desire somewhere, which, never suspected and never acknowledged, is, perhaps, never asserted except under the encouragement of an outside influence. Temptations are not dangerous unless they appeal to a tendency or a need. Had Coolidge been aware of Gerald's sudden passion for Jennie Sussex, he could not have taken so much pride in his own diplomacy. He had merely given an idea to a man who was in search of one—the eternal element in all transactions between the determined and the receptive.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "it is getting late. Hodson has promised to give me a lift to the railway station."

"Don't forget," said Federan, "that aunt expects you for Whitsun."

"It is very kind of you," said Coolidge, "and I'll be glad to come."

Federan went out into the hall with him, and saw him climb into the carrier's van beside packages, hampers and the like, and this seemed to him a humiliation nobly borne.

CHAPTER III

“Antisthenes answered one very wisely that told him Ismenias was an excellent player of ‘the flute. ‘But yet he is a naughty man,’ said he, otherwise he would not be so cunning at the flute as he is.’ . . . And Philip of Macedon said to his son Alexander the Great, that at a Feast had sung passing sweetly.—‘Art thou not ashamed, son, to sing so well?’”

Plutarch's Lives.—NORTH.

DURING the service next morning at the parish church, Federan amused himself by studying the few girls of the district for whom he had once felt the stirrings of attraction, and about whom he had often endeavoured to reach that romantic form of despair in which young people of both sexes take such peculiar satisfaction. But the longish nose (once worshipped as purely Roman) of Miss Charlotte Gillespie now seemed exasperating, and the ruddy appleish cheeks of Miss Ada Bampton looked coarse, and the docile eyes (once compared to those of the gazelle) of Miss Katie Dunmore were stupid, and the grace of Miss Izzie Barker was lankiness, and the plump Miss Jessie Hammond was a monster (poor Jessie once admired as Rubensesque), and the ethereal,

pale Miss Lilian Arbuthnot (in former days the Elaine of his imagination) was now a sickly and affected minx. He listened to the hymns, however, as he had never listened before, because Jennie's voice, although she sang quietly, was the sweetest in the choir :

“ When God of old came down from Heav'n,
In power and wrath He came ;
Before His feet the clouds were riven,
Half darkness and half flame.”

The Miss Leddles kept their gaze on their prayer-books, but they were quite aware that Gerald seemed more attentive than usual ; that his expression was inclined to melancholy ; that he had new gloves, new boots, and a new necktie, and they gathered, from the manner in which he placed his hat under the seat, that it was either new or freshly ironed.

When the vicar gave out the text for his sermon—
“ Grant us to have a right judgment in all things . . . the prince of this world cometh,”—they glanced obliquely at their nephew's tie, and sighed with emphasis, and looked gratefully toward the pulpit. Federan did not hear one word of the discourse : he wondered instead whether Jennie would allow him to walk home with her, whether she would be nice to him, whether she was a flirt, whether she found him dull and provincial. Men seriously in love are always modest. At last he caught the familiar “ The blessing of God Almighty,” and, after a decent pause, he was the first in the congregation to step into the aisle.

His aunts blushed, and offered longer thanksgivings than was their custom. This was done by murmuring the same act of praise twice slowly. When they ventured to move from their respective cushions, their nephew was already waiting at the foot of the gallery stairs for Miss Sussex. There happened to be a choir practice that day—a rehearsal of the evening anthem—so, at the sight of Miss Leddle's black silk mantle, moving slowly behind the other mantles down the centre aisle, Federan went up to the organ-loft. The two aunts looked for him in vain, and when they reached the cheerful churchyard they fancied that the several groups which had gathered there according to social precedence near the most important graves were discussing Gerald's latest infatuation. When Mrs Marblay herself plucked Miss Daisy by the sleeve, both of the sisters knew, with sinking hearts, that a crisis of some kind had been reached in Franton affairs. Mrs Marblay was known as "such a lady," and if she ever spoke to any one after church, that honour was reserved either for Mrs Tredegar of the Manor or the infirm widow of the donkeyman—by preference the latter, because she was always grateful for the distinction, whereas Mrs Tredegar was sometimes plainly bored.

"Dear Miss Leddle," said Mrs Marblay, "can you spare me a minute or two?" and she led the way to a granite tablet inscribed to the memory of a certain Major the Hon. Francis Ashe, an elderly bachelor

who had died suddenly at Cumbersborough, and whose tomb had been given, by silent unanimous consent, to Mrs. Marblay for a Sunday rendezvous, because she was well connected.

"Dear Miss Leddle," repeated Mrs Marblay, "I'm so unhappy. I'm afraid Miss Sussex will have to leave us. I don't want to offend the Duchess, but Miss Sussex is too clever—if you know what I mean—for my little school. Doesn't she sing well?" She rolled up her eyes. "Isn't her French quite extraordinary?" Here she looked perturbed. "Have you seen her dance?" Here she studied the square toes of her own cashmere boots. "I shall never find her equal," she continued, "and I cannot hope to replace her. But she excites the children; she's too animated. And, in fact, *it doesn't do*. She has turned the drawing-master's head. He's a delicate young man and nothing to look at—one has to be so careful; but she admired his studies in still life, and his mother, whom he supports, is heart-broken. And one of my senior pupils' brothers, Colonel Nash's eldest boy, calls sometimes for his sister. *It doesn't do*. The Colonel himself came last week, and seeing Jennie in the class-room, he remarked, 'You won't keep that very long.' Military gentlemen are brief, but—you know!"

The Miss Leddles, who were unacquainted with any military gentlemen, implied that indeed, to their cost, they knew.

"They grasp a situation," said Mrs Marblay.

"But her personal conduct leaves nothing to be desired, I trust?" said Miss Leddle, praying inwardly and sincerely for strength. The eyes of the parish seemed burning into her back, and, as a fire, consuming her very raiment.

"The personal conduct of Miss Sussex is, so far, satisfactory," said Mrs Marblay; "but, to be frank, her heart is not in her work. She is thinking perhaps of other things. I know that she reads Byron, and last week I was obliged to cancel her second lecture on the Romans. You would have thought it was a chapter from a novel—so different from dear Miss Banham's method. I'm too miserable about it all, but she must go. *It doesn't do.* The parents are beginning to get uneasy."

By this time Federan and Jennie, in animated conversation, were seen coming out of the church. The girl bowed, "almost regally," as Mrs Marblay said later, "right and left" to her acquaintances, and proceeded down the path on to the high road, with the proud man carrying books by her side. After the excitement, however, of defying the assembled parish, Gerald could find nothing to say. It was enough for him to hear her dress rustle, and watch her charming face, and feel her shoulder sometimes brush against his as they walked along. It had been complained by certain female critics that her figure was not "domestic"; beyond doubt it was beautiful, and

every male creature in Franton thought privately, at any rate, that Federan could not be expected to resist her. His heart was full of words and inexpressible feelings: the music he had just heard, the solemnity of the old church, the bright sunshine and the hedges covered with blossoms, mingled to make one strong emotion—the desire somehow to be a better man than he had been in the past.

“You’re a good influence,” he said abruptly. “I hate a lot of things I once thought well enough in their way. I’m thick-skinned and pretty hard, but when I’m with you I seem to change. And it’s because you’re fascinating. I don’t believe you are an angel by any means.”

“I never said I was,” answered Jennie.

“I don’t think pious thoughts when you sing hymns. You make them sound like ‘I arise from dreams of thee.’ I tremble all over, and my head swims.”

“That is because they don’t have the windows open.”

“No! that isn’t the reason. It is the same when you sing to the guitar. I don’t know whether I hate it or love it.”

“Well, I won’t sing to you again. That settles the doubt.”

“You couldn’t make me forget what I have heard already.”

"Why should I want you to forget it?" said the girl.

"It has made me unhappy; it has made me discontented; it has made me hate myself; it has made me sick of all I ever did, and all the people I ever liked."

"I don't mind that, either. I think I shall keep on singing."

"Will you keep on being friends with me?" he said eagerly.

"Of course. What kind of a tree is that over there?"

"An elm. I wonder, now, whether I want your friendship?"

"It seems to me," said Jennie, "that you don't know what you want."

"I do. I do indeed. Shall I tell you?"

"Another time, yes. Meanwhile, we can wonder about each other."

"You don't care much, do you, for anybody?"

"No, not much."

"And yet, that can't be true. I'll swear you're not heartless. Are you heartless?"

This absurd dialogue, which seemed tragic to the man and most entertaining to the woman, was interrupted by Dr Rench's brougham, which was driven at a sharp rate past them.

"Miss Tredegar must be ill again. The Tredegars were not in church," said Jennie.

"I hope she is ill," said Federan, "because I have an appointment to see her to-morrow and I dread it. I can't tell you how I dread it!"

Then he remembered his long talk with Coolidge and the scheme about the property.

"I can't," he exclaimed, half aloud.

"You can't *what*?" asked Jennie. She turned her countenance toward him—she wore a mocking smile, but there was something in her eyes which made him hope.

"I can!" he said,—“I can!” And he grew pale from the force of his desires.

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

"I'll tell you some day," he answered.

The rest of the way they kept silent.

CHAPTER IV

“Imagination, the source of all our passions and all our errors, so far from controlling the will, becomes its substitute.”

VOLTAIRE.

WHILST Mrs Marblay was uttering her complaint to the Leddle sisters, another group, composed of individuals in the front rank of Franton and Cumbersborough society, had collected round the vicar's wife, Mrs Gillespie. She had been the daughter of an eminent Under-Secretary, and she had something, therefore, of past official life to raise her above the dead level of rustic prejudices. Some ladies made no secret of their preference for her opinion rather than that of the Dowager-Duchess on any particularly fine point in etiquette. The present dilemma had reference to the invitations for the annual subscription ball, which always took place on the Monday after Whitsun, in aid of the local Cottage Hospital. Lady patronesses, especially chosen from the large and mixed hospital committee, organised the entertainment, bought the tickets at a reduction, and distributed them to the “suitable.”

In reality it was several private dances amalgamated into one function: careful hostesses found the arrangement economical, and it was also a great business and distraction. The tyranny of the executive (newly elected each autumn), the badness of the supper, the impossibility of getting asked to the affair unless one had "a friend at Court"; the dresses one saw when one was found worthy of admission; the strange, often injudicious, conduct which never failed to take place on the part of some, at least, of those present; the speculations for days before, the gossip for days after the event, kept a number of elderly, or bedridden, or disappointed, or philosophic, or cynical persons not merely alive, but eager to live. The Charity Ball was to Cumbersborough circles what the soul is to the body—the fountain of all emotions.

"Ought Miss Sussex to be asked?" was the question presented to Mrs Gillespie's consideration. The Dowager-Duchess was a subscriber and the supreme patroness, but it was her rule, in order to avoid the peril of exciting jealousies, never to send out, or initial, or suggest the sending, of an invitation card. She observed this Quixotic resolve with such scrupulosity that, although she always sent flowers and fruit for the table and three footmen to direct the waiters of the leading confectioner, she herself did not attend the ball—again in order to avoid the danger of seeming to notice one lady more than another.

"One can't be too careful," she would say to her real friends—who all lived in London, and thought her rather tiresome and never wanted her at their parties. It was felt that the Duchess could not ask Jennie to the ball. On the other hand, would she not think it a strange oversight if her own second cousin (and an acknowledged relationship into the bargain) were left out in the cold?

"She must be asked, of course," said Mrs Gillespie. "And how in the world was she forgotten?"

Mrs Howland, the wife of Colonel Howland, did not know. Mrs Puddifant, the wife of Edgeham Puddifant, M.P., declared that the matter had only just been brought to her notice. Mrs Bouverie-Copeland, the widow of the late Charles Bouverie-Copeland, Q.C., could but express profound regret at the awkwardness of the whole situation.

"Is Miss Sussex to be regarded *quâ* school-governess or *quâ* a baronet's daughter?" as she put it, having mastered precision in thought under the guidance of the deceased barrister. "Would one be accused of favouritism if one governess were asked and not another? Wouldn't it be thought snobbish to make a glaring distinction in Miss Sussex's case?"

"We run that risk," said Mrs Gillespie; "but I'm afraid it is unavoidable. Perhaps she won't accept."

"Mr Federan has accepted," said Mrs Howland.

"Men are so scarce, one had to ask him," she added, apologetically.

"You were quite right," said Mrs Gillespie. "He seems very gentlemanly, and the Federans are quite nice people."

"But," observed Mrs Howland, "if Miss Sussex comes, I hope she won't dance with him the whole evening. In that case, he is as good as no man at all so far as the rest are concerned." She had three unmarried daughters.

Each lady had a keen sense of humour where the others were droll, and exchanging sly twinkling glances which meant, "She wants Federan for one of her own girls," they separated with every outward manifestation of neighbourly love.

When the Miss Leddles entered their house, they found that Jennie had gone to her room. In crossing the garden her hat had caught in a lilac bough, and much as she enjoyed talking to Federan—perhaps because she liked him—she would not remain with him while she had doubts about her appearance. He made a bitter remark when she seemed more interested in her own hair than in his conversation, and as he watched her move away, holding her long dress in one hand and her hat with the other, he had mournful thoughts on the lightness of women's minds.

"She doesn't care two straws about me," he murmured,

Jennie glanced in her mirror, and then smiled from the window to Federan, who had remained standing where she had left him, on the lawn. He was handsome, she thought, and then she reproached herself for attaching so much importance to mere looks. Was he in love with her? He wished her to think so. She sat, well concealed by the dimity curtains, and rested her face on her hands while she considered him slowly. It was her habit to think rather than to observe, to imagine rather than to penetrate; and her fancy, once attracted, wove such colours round its object, threw such lights and shades upon it, invested it with such rare, strange qualities, that, at the close, it became an image of what was not, painted by a caprice which owned no law.

At first the young man seemed a mere figure in the landscape which stretched away to the church-fields—two paddocks separated by a wide path and bordered by tall elms. The sweethearts of Franton walked, on Sunday afternoons, in these pleasant acres, or sat on the fence, or, when the season was dry, on the banks of the long ditch, kicking their heels and working patterns with sticks in the dust. Now the roadway, chequered by long shadows and brilliant bars of sunshine, was deserted: a few birds hopped about, and sometimes a twig fell, or a young rabbit rushed into the open. The sky was a little troubled, and its delicate blue was veiled by gathering clouds more violet than grey; now and then a sharp gust

of wind made the tree-tops sway and the leaves rustle in unison. Far away the low purple hills stood clearly—as they do before rain—against the horizon; the cottage roofs up on the high road were red, or red-grey with lichen, or red-green with moss; from every kitchen chimney the smoke rose in gusts and sudden flights; and the light upon the pasture-land showed up the strange changing hues of the grass, now emerald dark, now yellow, now sunburnt to the colour of dust or sand or hay. It was like one of Constable's pictures, Jennie thought, remembering hours she had once spent in former days with an old friend in the National Gallery. But she did not wish to remember that old friend now, and she looked again at Federan. Franton she knew, and its slow-thinking, slow-moving people were not for her. Business was their life; romance was hers—good in itself even though nothing came of it. She had tried to hide her soul out of sight; her mother, the Miss Leddles—no one knew her thoughts or feelings; the music burning at her heart like wine was inaudible; the wonder at the world, the desire for love, the passionate fear of disillusion, the reluctance to hear all that could be heard lest she should hear too much—these were her own secrets, never to be told. She knew every word of "The Triumph of Time"; she had never loved, and she had never been deceived—yet the lines she found herself constantly repeating were these :

“I shall go my ways, tread out my measure,
Fill the days of my daily breath
With fugitive things not good to treasure,
Do as the world doth, say as it saith;
But if we had loved each other—”

“But if we had loved each other.” Surely the bitterest woe of human destinies was in that cry. It was not a reproach—for who can love at will? Still, that was the foregone alternative in so many lives; either the man or the woman had to feel that the one thing which could make all the difference was lacking. Generally, in self-mockery, they drove the eternal bad bargain; finding the hope too far away, they took the disappointment, which is always so terribly near. This she would never do, she thought; and again she looked at Federan.

One still finds, in provincial or yeoman families of good stock, a strength and beauty which seems a survival of the old traditions. The solicitor's son, who was of Norse extraction, seemed the prompt, gay, fearless Siegfried of the Hero-book—Dragon killer and Prince-royal, blacksmith and horse-subduer, handsome, as the old singer has expressed it, “as if he were limned on parchment by a master's art,” which is the best way of saying that he fulfilled incomparably the romantic ideal. Every woman who saw him felt and acknowledged his charm; he was, moreover, the finest rider in the county; he had won the Victoria Cross in Africa and the Challenge

Cup of the Framphshire steeplechase. Jennie decided that he was superb, and from that hour the mystery in tragic love was no mystery to her.

“ And she said, ‘ O Sigurd, Sigurd, now hearken while I
swear
That the day shall die for ever and the sun to blackness
wear,
Ere I forget thee, Sigurd, as I lie ’twixt wood and
sea
In the little land of Lymdale and the house that fostered
me. ’ ”

That was the promise of Brynhild to her lover, and as the words came to the girl, it seemed her promise also—her promise to Federan. The rising wind moaned in the chimney and shook many blossoms to the ground ; the hill lines deepened, the little tame rook that often cawed on her window-sill now perched there in silence with his head on one side, as though he were listening for the sound of the sharp summer rain in the laburnum trees. Jennie recalled Gerald’s glances, the things he had said, the pressure of his hand when he said good-night and good-morning. She had been told that he was a flirt, that his affections were sudden and brief, and her heart contracted painfully at the thought of the several girls he had cared for in the past. Each must have left her trace and impress—if not for deep, certainly for long continuance on his memory. The element of sun and azure which should be the

perpetual atmosphere of first love had already, with Jennie, the sea's wild throb and salt. Was Federan merely trifling with her, as he had trifled with others? Conscious, and almost fearing the intensity of her feelings, she had also an instinctive certainty that the young man was, this time, very much in earnest. But her reverie had made her nervous, and before she ventured downstairs she read some quiet pages from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and tried to think about Christian's conversation with Piety.

Charlotte, the maid in the kitchen, was cutting a lemon into singular designs for the garniture of the roast veal, when the postman, dressed in his Sunday clothes, tapped at the back door. She saw him first passing the window, and she could not believe her own eyes.

"La! Mr Staylings!" she exclaimed, lifting the latch: "whatever is the matter?" Her face was crimson, for although she had no reason to suppose her charms had upset his judgment, she was wondering wildly whether he had come, driven by some inscrutable and unaccountable impulse, to make her an offer of marriage. Simple women in the country are never wholly unprepared for miracles.

"Is Miss Sussex at home?" said he. "Here's a letter I have overlooked somehow. It ought to have been delivered yesterday."

Charlotte, bitterly disappointed, dropped into a

chair and returned by degrees to the dulness of a world in which probabilities were far too common. On recovering from her trance, she stared so mournfully at Staylings that the staid man, in spite of his better knowledge, felt guilty.

“Don’t look at me like that ; it’s an accident that might happen at any time,” said he. “Had I better see Miss Sussex myself ? ”

“The funny thing is,” answered Charlotte, in a confidential, alluring manner, “that she has been asking for letters ever since she has been here, as though she was expecting one. She has come down morning after morning, and sort of looked at the side-board—without seeming to look. Lately she has gone by without looking for it. She has got bright again. I do wonder whether this is the letter.”

Staylings shuffled on his feet, and fixed a wistful gaze on the garden gate.

“Pleasant as this is, miss,” he said, at last, “I must be getting on.”

He lingered a moment or two longer—not because he wished to stay, but because Charlotte’s wronged air made it difficult for him to go. When he finally left it was on tiptoe—as though he were creeping out of church before the Litany began. As he went, he murmured again, with an imbecile, propitiating smile : “Pleasant as this is—”

The delayed letter was brought to Jennie, by Miss Leddle’s orders, when they were all sitting on the

lawn taking coffee after their early dinner. It was a rule of the house that no messages of any description should be delivered immediately before or during a meal. Old Mr Leddle had established the custom, and in forty years it had never been relaxed. Federan saw Jennie turn pale when she examined the envelope. She opened it at last, and read its contents with a changing countenance, sometimes smiling and sometimes a little vexed. Then, encountering the inquisitive glance of Miss Daisy, she pressed her brow with her hand, slipped the letter where some flowers were thrust in her bodice, and looked away into the distance quietly. The aunts, whom Gerald had annoyed by coming to the table very late and eating salad only, pursed up their lips, lifted their eyebrows, and otherwise indicated a hope that he was not blind to Miss Sussex's agitation. They were becoming hourly more jealous of her influence ; she was not of their class—a good class, with much pride of its own : to them she represented, in spite of her poverty, the frivolous world of fashionable, shameless women, who were considered good so long as they kept out of gross scandals, and beautiful if they used enough paint and hair-dye. There is no loving-kindness even in the best of provincial Christians for ill-behaved members of the aristocracy ; there is rather a fierce consuming wrath and a desire for swift vengeance. Revolution and the democratic spirit in England come, not as they do elsewhere in Europe from the common

people, but from the solid wage-paying and wage-inheriting of the nation. Miss Leddle's suspicion of Jennie expressed the normal attitude of the highly respectable country-bred toward a girl brought up among titled or well-known persons in London. The word "fast" conveyed precisely Miss Daisy's opinion of the outsider's dangerous qualities; and Miss Leddle could not see why her nephew should allow himself to be made a plaything of by a foolish attachment. That Sunday afternoon the two spinsters, interested in Franton and Cumbersborough gossip only, were unusually irritated because Jennie, in the hope of entertaining them, had told anecdotes during dinner about the celebrities her father had known and she had met. Was she trying to dazzle them? Did she ask them to think that folk who were mentioned in the newspapers had quality of another and better sort than the landed gentry of Frampshire? Talk about Miss Tredegar of the Manor, or Lady Jane Ricksworth of the Hall, or the Bagot-Hubbards, or the Pangbournes, was always well worth hearing, but who—out of London—cared two buttons for London people. Had Jennie ever lived or visited much in provincial society she would have known this. Not knowing it, she wondered in vain why the sisters were so sullen.

"The coffee is getting cold," said Federan, unable to bear the silence any longer. "I wish I could take your interest in the clouds!"

She was still leaning back in the wicker-work chair ; her hat was pulled over her brow, her strictly beautiful feature—but he could see a heavy coil of chestnut hair at the nape of her neck, and her delicate chin, and her curved mouth, and the tip of her straight nose. The one luxury Sir Fortescue had been able to afford his daughter was a horse ; she was too tall to look her best in the saddle, but she rode well, and by riding she had gained a suppleness and grace which showed to great advantage when she was either walking or dancing or resting. She reminded Federan of the slender, elegant goddesses, with slight hips and long limbs, of modern sculpture—fragile but not heroic, lovely but not commanding, bewitching but not terrible, tender but not passionate. He had often bought magazines which contained photographs of these marble women exhibited in the Salon and the Academy, and he had always destroyed them in anger because they seemed to him artificial, misleading types of excellence. Yet here, at last, before his eyes was the imagined unattainable in actual flesh and blood. He too read poetry, and he too had a memory for fine lines :

“Through thy garments the grace of thee glows,”

occurred to him as he studied her, but his aunts disturbed him by their presence ; he wanted to be alone with Jennie in the garden of lilacs.

“A very old friend of mine is on his way home from

West Africa," said the girl ; " this letter is from him. He has known me ever since I was a child. I had not heard from him for a whole year." She laughed nervously, as people often do from force of habit : the sound has the notes but not the inspiration of mirth, and for the proud it is often a way of sobbing. " I was just beginning to forget him. I suppose it was because I had not heard."

Miss Leddle and Miss Daisy expressed their displeasure at this strange turn in the conversation by rising with much dignity from their chairs, and moving, like timid geese, across the lawn into the house.

Federan was so glad at their departure that he forgot its ominous abruptness, and Jennie was so absorbed in her own thoughts that she already seemed alone for some time.

" Why did your friend go away ? " asked Gerald.

" He went away to make a fortune," said the girl.

" Has he made it ? "

" I don't know."

" I used to wonder why men wanted money. I shall never wonder again. It isn't because they are vulgar—half the time it is because they wish to buy something beautiful. Beauty and happiness are so costly. Think how humiliating it is to say to yourself, ' I love that woman. If she were my wife I could believe in all the big ideas ; I could lead a life

with joy in it, and take the sorrow of death, and believe in the world to come and the goodness of God ; I could work—and I would be faithful. But—but—but—where's the money for the first step—just the first step ?' When the steady, dull ones come to that point, they either marry money or a useful drudge. When the passionate ones come to it, they won't quite sell their souls, but they over-eat and over-drink, and they try to forget what they really want. Just when they think they have forgotten, someone will sing a song, or they'll see a picture, or there will be something in an early morning or in the sky at night, or they will meet a woman—just the kind of woman they had buried with their old poetry books—and then the remorse and the self-condemnation and the self-disgust begin all over again, but ten hundred thousand times worse. A man is never happy with the second best, or the third best, or, indeed, with anything less than the ideal he is capable of imagining. So long as he can imagine something better than what he possesses already—so long as he can feel that he has missed something he might have had but for ill luck or no chance, he's bound to be miserable."

Blind jealousy of the absent friend had given Federan a greater vehemence than he showed as a rule in conversation. He felt that he was defending his own past, possibly his own future.

Miss Leddle, who sat at her bedroom window,

which commanded a view of the garden, trembled at the sound of her nephew's voice. She could not hear his words, but the air had caught the spell and electricity of emotion.

Jennie answered him quickly, lest by saying too much he should hurry them both into avowals which were not quite ripe yet for declaration, and spoil a suspense which was not wholly suspense, but rather a day-dream from which she was most unwilling to be roused. If he had asked her then whether she loved him, she could not have given the right answer. To know a truth in one's soul is by no means the same thing as being able to confess it in plain speech; great passions and beliefs live, no doubt, from the moment of their first conception in the mind, but the life is a seed-life—they have to grow into vigour secretly, till at last the unutterable and indefinable sentiment deepens into the dominating and acknowledged influence of a life. Love is in its most exquisite phase perhaps when it is stealing force from every thought, gaining mastership, here a little and there a little, from every word and look and action—when it is still to be argued with, still to be doubted, put down, and wisely controlled. Jennie was now certain enough of Federan to ignore the perilousness of her own position; she was like a swimmer who, exultant in overcoming great waves, forgets the undercurrent.

“This friend of mine,” she said, pleased at Gerald's

display of feeling, "is not like you. With work, a friend, and a pipe, he feels himself already next door to heaven. He would call everything that you and I might wonder about 'obvious.' Sometimes I think him clever ; sometimes I am half afraid that he is stupid."

"Is he in love with you ?" asked Federan.

"Surely not."

"Then let me see you tear up his letter."

Her instinct was to obey, but she repressed the craving as a weakness.

"I couldn't do that. I must read it again."

"I'll burn to-night every letter I possess—if you will only tear up this one," he exclaimed.

The unfortunate allusion to his own correspondence drove the colour from her cheeks and added fervour to her resolve: "Some letters are better burnt. This kind of a letter is better kept. I'll go in now and answer it."

She left her chair and walked away toward the house, re-reading her friend's communication as she went. Federan, heart-sick with jealousy, admiring her body, fearing her spirit, and blind to the offence he had given, followed. But Miss Daisy called to him from her window: "Don't smoke in the drawing-room, Gerald."

"The most awful room in the house!" he exclaimed angrily: "not a chair one can sit in, a little table at every turn, a piano that is always locked on

Sundays, lamps that give no light, and photographs of all the relatives I detest ! Is it necessary to ask me not to go there ? ”

Jennie was now out of sight. With an oath and a scowl, he turned away toward the road which led to the supposed coal district round Franton Manor.

CHAPTER V

“Ye are like them that sleep on the top of a mast, for the Dead Sea is under you—a gulf that hath no bottom. . . . Simple said, ‘I see no danger’; Sloth said, ‘Yet a little more sleep’; and Presumption said, ‘Every tub must stand upon its own bottom.’ And so they lay down to sleep again.”
—JOHN BUNYAN (*The Pilgrim’s Progress*).

JENNIE’s letter was dated from some station in Nigeria, and it ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR, DEAR ROSE AND MOON,—

“(My little pocket copy of old Khayyam may be an excuse for the form of address—in case you resent my lapse into metaphor.) Rose and Moon, therefore, I repeat. You know how I hate writing. The moment the pen gets into my hand it begins to jump about. If I could whistle all I want to say, it might be easier, but steel, ink, and paper are detestable. I have been very busy: twenty men under me: some were blacks, and they bore the climate better. Five of us died, and I had a touch of the fever myself. The fact is, one gets the good pay because of the climate and the risk—fortunately one has no time to think about either. You must not fear that I am becoming sentimental, but I miss our

Sunday talks and the Queen's Hall concerts more than anything. Of course, I knew they couldn't last. At first I used to fancy I heard your voice a dozen times a day—this was always on Sundays. Habit plays such tricks. I have a collection of your photographs—from the time you were one year and seven months to the year you used hairpins and twisted up the lovely long braid. I sha'n't bore you any more now. This scrawl is not worth the postage. Do write to me when you have time.—Your affectionate friend, JOHN HARLOWE."

Harlowe was the son of a distinguished but poor member of the Indian Civil Service—the late Sir Harvey Harlowe, K.C.S.I., K.C.M.G., C.I.E., ex-Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Provinces and Oudh. John was the seventh child of this eminent man, who died, it was thought, in order that his life assurance might pay his creditors. At any rate, he perished by sufficiently natural means; his liabilities were scrupulously met, and his family were left to deal with the problems of existence as best they might. John went out as a mining expert to Nigeria; he was considered very clever in his own line, and the Directors of the Company who employed him really hoped that he would live long enough, at least, to fulfil his mission. Jennie had a true friendship for the plain, alert, unassuming young man, but she had never been in love with him: she

was able to persuade herself that she had not encouraged him except as a good comrade. There is no woman, however, who does not love to be loved. The girl knew that poor John was her slave, and his letter made her more unhappy than impatient. She could think of nothing to say in reply. When she sat down at her table she still saw Federan's face before her eyes, and Federan's words still rang in her ears, and the touch of Federan's hand when he first met her that morning still seemed to clasp her willing fingers. So she closed the blotting-book, and waited on, feeling her thoughts gathering force, and knowing well the point to which they tended. They meant, in the present, an irresistible joy, and in her foreboding a permanent yoke. Against her knowledge, if not against her inclination, Federan had stolen her heart. It was no longer her own—it was his. She hoped, and hoped sincerely, that he was an unconscious thief, for she had more than a normal share of that caution most women possess in betraying the full force of their affection. She would love him always and him alone, without a wavering thought, but she did not wish him to be so certain as she was of such constancy.

The world, misconstruing his charm of manner, believed him false; the world declared that he was a self-indulgent, idle scamp; the world pretended that he cared for no one and had been born to come to evil; the world maintained that he was ever

too happy to rest on others the consequences of his own misdoings. True, it was the little world at Franton, and it seemed to have its circumference contained within Mrs Marblay's private boudoir behind the schoolroom at the seminary, and it seemed to speak with the tongue of Mrs Marblay. Nevertheless, its warning was bitter, and the girl, in defying it, knew that whether the theatre of one's life is set in the greatest city or in a remote parish, the strokes of gossip are unrepealable. Tattle over an obscure tea-table has all the essential vitality, if not the mighty events, of secret murmuring among the powerful. In the one case a humble career, in the other a whole nation, may be in the balance, but in both instances the world—the discerning, unsparing, remorseless world—manifests its spirit. It is, moreover, the one prophet who works, it would seem, with ingenious energy, to make adverse predictions come to pass. Jennie had heard her father say this often; but she had never altogether understood his bitterest sayings—they did not touch her life or her brief experience. Now that she was thrown upon her own resources, Sir Fortescue's old conversation on distant political affairs rose in her memory with a new and near and fearful import. The individual is but the symbol of the great mass, and the history of a country is but the story, on the heroic measure, of any one human being. And just as a country on the verge of war will wait, with

enthusiasm and closed eyes, for the unexpected turn of affairs, some miraculous intervention, some awakening to a new and differently ordered universe, the young girl smiled at her own fears, and, trying not to think, she listened only to the mysterious beautiful promises of passion and youth. All that evening she kept silent, rapt in the enchantment of her hopes. She went to bed early, and Gerald did not return till midnight. Miss Daisy had to go downstairs in her dressing-gown to unbar the door and let him in. Jennie heard him say that he had supped with Coolidge.

The next morning Mrs Howland's coachman rode over on a pony with a basket of roses for Miss Leddle and an invitation to the ball that same night for Miss Sussex. Would she come with Mrs Howland's party? It was short notice, but Jennie had the dress she had worn to her mother's second wedding—a pretty pink dress covered with old lace, the one valuable heirloom in her possession—and she danced about the room with delight at the prospect of appearing in this finery at the Franton Town Hall. When she spread the garment out upon the bed for Miss Leddle and Miss Daisy's inspection, and showed them her small slippers and silk stockings, her long gloves and her feather fan, they admitted that it would be mistaken pride to remain at home.

“But who is this driving down through the Church-fields road?” exclaimed Miss Leddle, who

was near the window. "Is it Mrs Tredegar? It is, and Miss Tredegar is with her."

She saw the vehicle—an open landau drawn by two fat grey horses—turn the corner, and she heard it halt, a few moments later, at her own gate. The visitors' bell, which was seldom used, rang loudly, and the sisters, flushed, wondering, and excited, hastened away in their noiseless cashmere shoes to change their morning attire for something more elaborate.

In that part of the world no lady was ever expected to be quite prepared, so far as her own raiment was in question, to receive sudden callers. Rooms were supposed to be swept and garnished—that was the infallible sign of good management—but a housewife who was always found spick and span in her best gown, and did not have to keep visitors waiting while she dressed in order to receive them, would have created a bad impression. In the first place, she would have the air of one who looked to find the whole neighbourhood on her doorstep—an arrogant assumption; secondly, it would point to extravagance, vanity and wilful pride. Nevertheless, after one had waited twenty minutes or so for the mistress of the house, it was right to pretend by one's air that she had been detained for every impossible reason except that of dressing for the occasion. One had to look as though she had breakfasted at eight that morning in black silk trimmed with bugles. Such is the

actual hypocrisy of social etiquette when it is analysed. When Miss Leddle and Miss Daisy, therefore, were assuming the garments they considered appropriate to a ceremony so important as the reception of Mrs Tredegar under their roof, what was their amazement to hear from Charlotte that Miss Sussex only had been asked for? They heard Jennie leave her room and run down the staircase to the hall.

Miss Leddle restored her garnet brooch to its case, and stalked superbly into her sister's apartment.

"I am wondering," she observed, with that irony which is the substitute for humour in many women, "whether I am mistress of my own house!"

On catching sight of Jennie, Mrs Tredegar made a hasty remark to her daughter, and alighted from the carriage.

"You are Miss Sussex, I believe?" she said clearly, before crossing the threshold. She was a tall woman, with a nervous manner and a suspicious, unsympathetic expression of countenance. Her features were handsome, but pinched; the skin was tightly drawn over the bridge of her well-cut nose; she wore her grey hair brushed back from her bomb-shaped forehead, and her grey eyes, which had once been languorous, were now full of an indolent distrust. The ways of mankind, to her, were as little worth opposition as confidence.

"Have you heard from Dr Rench?" she said, following Jennie into the drawing-room. "Has he

told you about my daughter—who is sadly weak and ill? She does not get on with people, as a rule, but Dr Rench seemed to think that you might suit her. You are bright and lively ; Rachel is feeble and morbid.” She remained standing — an imposing figure in a long mantle, plumed bonnet and trailing skirt—a personage of the last generation, vigorous, full of scorn for the minor emotions. “I suppose I am right in assuming that you don’t find school work altogether congenial,” she continued. “Would you leave Mrs Marblay and come to us?” Then she held out her two hands towards Jennie and smiled, adding, “Do. I know you will. It is agreed, then?”

“I should love to come. But your daughter doesn’t know me.”

“She is in the carriage now. I’ll call her in.”

Mrs Tredegar went to the open window, beckoned, and then turned round. “She walks slowly. If she is querulous, be patient.”

“Really, mamma, it is the greatest bore getting out of the carriage. You know I hate it,” were Rachel’s words as she came into the room.

“This is Miss Sussex, dear. She has promised to come to us.”

“How do you do?” said Rachel, nodding her head and putting out her hand rather ungraciously. “I may as well tell you that I am bored to death. May I sit down? You know, Miss Sussex, it is

sheer waste of time for you or anyone else to attempt to amuse me. Dr Rench doesn't understand my case." She spoke, as it were, without any punctuation or difference of tone in passing from one subject to another. Self-absorbed rather than self-conscious, she talked as though her ideas and her words had no sort of connection. She was good-looking and graceful, very sallow, in spite of a touch of rouge on each cheek, and far too thin—in spite of the art exhibited in the arrangement of her clothes. People in Cumbersborough who had travelled would say that she looked like the Sarah Bernhardt of 1885.

"Our house is just the dullest in the world," she went on, "and I think it is very good of you to be willing to visit us. I have a passion for frankness. I think it a pity to start with any false notions on either side. Who is that man in the garden?"

"It is Miss Leddle's nephew," said Jennie, too startled to blush.

"I didn't know that she had a nephew," said Rachel. "Who is he? What is his name? What does he do? Fancy old Miss Leddle having a nephew! It is almost interesting. He has not got a bad figure."

"Don't you think, darling," said Mrs Tredegar, "that we had better be going now?"

"You always interrupt, mamma, just when I am getting a little amusement. Now that I have taken all the trouble to come in, you might let me sit still

in peace for a little while. Miss Sussex and I are beginning to like each other. But what an ugly room! How you must hate it! Is he nice to talk to?"

"Who?" said Jennie.

"The nephew-man. How old is he? I wish he would turn round. Has he got a moustache or a beard? I hate beards."

"This is his photograph."

Rachel could not restrain an exclamation of surprise when she first glanced at the picture, although she assumed quickly enough an air of indifference.

"I suppose one would call him handsome," she admitted, after a pause. The photograph represented a view, in profile, of Federan's head and shoulders. His dark, waving hair was smartly brushed after the military fashion; the two girls noted, breathlessly, his excellent brow and nose and mouth and chin, his full throat, his large but well-turned ear, the *fleur-de-llys* pin in his necktie, his admirable tweed coat, the carnation in his buttonhole, his general air of passionate charm. He seemed to be gazing, bravely, but without arrogance, proudly, but with a certain sweetness, straight in front of him—not at an individual, but into the ineffable future. On the stage such a face would have made its owner's fortune.

Rachel displayed discernment in her next remark. "He looks like H. B. Conway, the actor who played

the lover always in Robertson's pieces. Mamma used to adore Conway : she has his photograph as Captain Something-or-other in *Ours*. It almost makes me laugh to think of that funny comical old Miss Leddle having such a handsome relation. It is so quaint. If you come to us, nice Jennie-person, what will you read to me ? What sort of books ? Not *Esmond*, I hope. I am so tired of people who want to read *Esmond* aloud. I would rather talk. I like talking sometimes. And when are you coming ? Have you arranged to send the carriage for her, mamma ?”

“I have to see Mrs Marblay first,” said Jennie.

Mrs Tredegar owned that she had already consulted Mrs Marblay, who was entirely agreeable to the new plan.

“In that case I can come this week.”

“Our lawyer-man is coming on Thursday,” said Rachel. “I wasn't well enough to see him to-day. We have got to settle something stupid about the property. You know it is my property. I do hate it so. It bores me ; it is imbecile to spend such a lot of money on stone walls, or wiring to keep birds from the fruit. And I loathe fruit.” She reflected for an instant, and added, “I don't mind peaches.”

“I am sure, dear child, that Miss Sussex is not in the least interested in our tiresome affairs.”

“Anyhow,” said Rachel, ignoring her mother, “I want you to come. Perhaps you can be there when the lawyer-man calls, because I abhor business, and I

do not understand it, and they make me sign things which I cannot, and I will not, read. Too tedious. Now, mamma, I'll come. Would it be nearer to go through the garden? We shall have to pass the man, but I don't suppose he will mind."

Gerald heard them coming, however, and went to the stable-yard. After they had driven away he joined Jennie, who was standing on the front steps gazing after the carriage.

"And so those were the Tredegars of Franton Manor," he exclaimed. "Miss, they tell me, is a regular devil."

"I have promised to live with them."

"Why?"

"I felt sorry for the girl. She looked as though she had never loved anybody, or been loved."

"All the same, you don't seem very delighted at the prospect of joining her."

Jennie sighed deeply, and unaccountable tears filled her eyes. "I've been very happy here," she answered, "but I have stayed long enough. There's a Fate sending me away. I felt something coming. I couldn't think what it was."

"The life at this house isn't the life you're used to," said Federan, moodily. "You will feel more at home up there. Don't you suppose I know the difference between your set and mine?"

Her attraction for him depended far more than he himself was aware on that very difference in their

caste to which he referred. He was proud of his own sound ancestry, but his people, through lack of fortune or proper ambition, had never been able to take their right place in the county. Every day he met men who were as far inferior to him in birth as they were above him in merely social estimation. The rich brewers and bankers and members of the Stock Exchange who were gladly received by the Frampsire nobility were obscure indeed—if pedigrees counted—in comparison with the Federans. This made the young solicitor morose—especially when he realised that he would be expected to content himself with a burgess wife, and see the world, to which his own nature and instincts were irresistibly drawn, closed against him. He thought his taste was refined, because he craved the luxurious and extravagant life of the idle rich classes, and he mistook his sympathy with easy morals for an intellectual breadth of view. Such cravings and such errors in judgment ought never to be confused with snobbery. Federan's faults arose from his passions, his love of ease and pleasure, not from any deep or even subtle vulgarity; he was not vulgar, and he was oddly free from personal vanity. This exemption, in fact, redeemed his frequent heart affairs from the worst that can be urged against the ordinary sort of unconsidered philanderings. He never thought that it would be difficult for any woman to break with him; the pain of separation, he invariably believed, was always almost wholly on his own side.

"You will get to Franton and forget all about us," he said. "When I go there it will be as Miss Tredegar's man of business. She put me off to-day, and wrote as though I were a lad coming to measure curtain-rods!"

"She had never seen you, then. She didn't know you."

"Then why should she assume that I am a kind of servant? Because my father has allowed these people to treat him with impertinence. I don't blame an ill-bred woman; I blame my father, who is not ill-bred, but foolishly undignified. On the other hand, if I were rich, even an ill-bred woman would be polite enough."

"Ah, don't be cross!" said Jennie; "let us think about the ball to-night. I'm going. Mrs Howland has asked me."

But her gaiety had departed: the music, the movement, the colour, the pleasure, the joyous anticipations called up in her mind by Mrs Howland's invitation were suddenly dissipated, and her spirits fell. She realised that she was about to leave the small, still house with its pretty garden; a few days would pass, and then she would never again be able to help Miss Daisy by carrying every evening the plates of cold meat, the butter, the cake, the jam, and the fruit pies from the supper-table to the larder; she would never again be allowed to iron Miss Leddle's ribbons and best handkerchiefs, or wash

the china ornaments, or darn the worn backs of the drawing-room chairs; she would never again have the privilege of sharing the simple, homely life led by the two spinsters. To her it had been a new and gentle experience—a time stolen from the old order of things; almost a dream, or a peaceful comedy in which she had played, for a brief period, a hushed part.

“I have been happy here,” she exclaimed; “and, as it must end, I am glad it will end in a dance.”

“It’s a little country dance—it will seem nothing after the big parties in London.”

“But I was never happy in London.”

“Why not?”

“My father was a disappointed man. He would take me out and sigh the whole evening. He would look at the friends who had left Oxford when he left it: two are Cabinet Ministers, one is a Lord of Appeal, one is an Ambassador, one is a Director of the Bank of England, another is a Bishop. None of them compared with him when he was at Balliol—he was the cleverest of them all. And he lived to see them become great worldly successes, while he plodded and looked on. I didn’t care—I was always proud of him. But he cared, not because he envied them—that wasn’t his feeling—but because life didn’t seem fair. ‘It’s the unfairness,’ he used to say: ‘those fellows may deserve all they have got. I deserved something, too, and I did not get it. *The*

race is not to the swift. Then why race? Why strive for a prize?' Could there be any happiness with a mind so sad as that?"

"There's a good deal of truth in your father's view. Why race, indeed? There was a big benevolent man—he looked like the pictures of God in illustrated Bibles—who used to visit the grammar school I attended years ago. He had his pocket always full of new pennies—never enough to go round. So he would throw them among the boys, and they scrambled for them—sprawling and grovelling and kicking on the ground like puppies hungry for food. I would never scramble. The whole thing seemed ignominious. But the big benevolent man with not enough for everybody is terribly symbolic."

"I could be contented without new pennies here," said Jennie, thinking aloud.

Federan flushed with surprise at the encouragement offered by her enthusiasm for simplicity, and, had he cared for plain living himself, he might there and then have owned how much he loved her and how slender his resources were. But, strong as his passion was, his misgivings about poverty were even stronger. The idyllic dulness of his home was a very old story to him; the quaint household customs of his aunts, who were not "too proud for dairy work or sale of eggs," held no classic grace or suggestion for his mind; he was not ashamed, he told himself, of their mode of living, but he thought it rather squalid.

“You may like it,” he said to Jennie, “because of its novelty. You would tire of it on the first wet week in autumn! People pretend that one must have wealth in order to live decently in big cities. But one must have wealth in the country also:—

‘Would I had fallen upon those happier days
That poets celebrate. . . .
Nymphs were Dianas then, and swains had hearts
That felt their virtues.’

I remember that because I once tried to put it into Latin. The poets were liars.”

“You are in a bad humour,” said Jennie, “and I’ll go back to my room.”

“Wait!” he exclaimed; “there’s a spider on your hair. ‘Matin—chagrin; midi—souci; soir—espoir.’ This is a case of *souci*.”

“Yes,” she said, blushing and laughing, “anxiety about you—not about myself. Don’t kill the spider.”

She was still laughing when she turned away, and she smiled till she reached her own room. Then she locked the door and burst into tears. Perhaps she was a little hurt because Federan had shown no interest in the prospect of seeing her that night at the ball. The pink dress looked ghostly on the bed; the old school-books, which she had renounced, had never before seemed so precious. She put them into a wooden box, and sat down on the floor by the

box, weeping as though she were weeping over the dead.

"It's all over," she sobbed to herself; "it's all over."

Perhaps she meant that the romantic prelude had been played; that the business of life was about to begin.

CHAPTER VI

“The best critic that ever wrote, speaking of some passages in Homer which appear frivolous, says indeed, that they are dreams, but the dreams of Jupiter.”
STEELE.

FEDERAN killed the spider by wrapping it in an ivy leaf and crushing it under his heel. Then, because he disliked being alone, he called his aunt's watchdog, and strolled away to his favourite haunt—a small plantation, known as the pinetum, on the way to the big paddock. Federan's whistle was a threat rather than an entreaty, and Roy, the terrier, cringed as he followed him, and halted when he dared and looked back wistfully toward his kennel by the back gate. Gerald had no doubt now that at last he was irrevocably in love. His quiet manner, which had disappointed the sensitive girl, was the result of a most unusual exercise, on his part, of self-control. She was so much more fascinating and exquisite than any woman he had ever met that he laboured under the disadvantage common to every man who is deeply infatuated : he feared his chances ; he doubted his own power to win her affection ; he knew—men are far less than women the dupes of self-deception—he knew how little he deserved her. True, she was his

destiny, but people missed their destinies. Indeed, was not the whole machinery of heaven and hell and the earth perpetually set in motion to dissociate those who were born to be together, and disorganise things which were created to work in unison? So, at least, it seemed to Federan. There was no pledge of Providential goodwill, therefore, in the fact that he had met his fate. What was Iago's advice to the love-sick Roderigo: "Put money in thy purse. . . . Make all the money thou canst: put money enough in thy purse." The young man had seen *Othello* played at Southampton by a provincial company, and Iago had seemed to him the one reasoning character in the tragedy. The admonition, "Put money enough in thy purse," had become with Federan the one answer to every enigma in the universe: it saved him the trouble of thinking; it was his reply to his aunts when they reproached him for idleness; it was his excuse for hating cordially those who were able to lead the kind of existence which he longed for and could not afford. Jennie, however, was worth an effort: the mere remembrance of her smiling eyes and lips, her splendid hair (once he had caught her drying it by the kitchen fire; she was sitting on the wide fender, and the splendid hair, waving and ruddy, fell to her knees), her figure, her voice, her weakness for looking in the glass (she enjoyed her own appearance), made his heart beat and his pulses throb, his face flush and his strong frame tremble.

"I must get the money somehow!" he exclaimed, and he struck Roy because the dog exasperated him by looking so resigned to the misery of his lot. "Silly ass of a dog!" he muttered. "Go home. Did you hear me? Go home!"

He turned back himself and went to Miss Leddle, who, wearing a linen sunbonnet, was in the poultry-yard studying a pair of drakes she had just bought from a neighbour.

"When can you spare me a few minutes," said Gerald, "just to talk over the reinvestment of that seven thousand?"

"My dear boy! It will mean days of consideration!"

She looked with meaning in the direction of Charlotte. Miss Leddle could not bear to have her private affairs discussed before a third person or without due warning.

"Of course," said Gerald, "it is more difficult to place a small sum than a large one. You realise that, don't you, aunt?"

"I like a mortgage better than anything," said Miss Leddle: "a good mortgage is always satisfactory."

"Well, I suppose you will be guided by me in any case. What am I here for?"

"I am only too glad of your advice, my dear. But," she added, "at a proper time. I am thinking about these drakes now. This one, when his time comes, will make a fine hat. I never saw richer

feathers. He's really a beautiful bird, but I wish he'd take to his food better. Here, chookie—chookie !”

Uttering this peremptory endearment, she scattered some grain from her basket, and, holding her drab skirt well above her short striped black, mauve and orange petticoat she stalked around the yard, followed by Charlotte and a dozen docile hens.

Gerald thought, “How long would Jennie do that ?” and yet he almost wished that his aunts would be gathered to their fathers and leave him the property. He knew the wish was abominable, but he asked himself, “What can one expect ? Suffering makes the best of us selfish. So long as there isn't enough to go round, people will want to see the crowd thinned a little. That's inevitable. It is false sentiment to pretend otherwise.”

Then he remembered the circumstance of his mother's death, which occurred when he was a little boy : how the poor pale body lay on the best bed under a white linen sheet covered with wreaths ; how his father sat quite still and Miss Daisy told him it was his duty, for Gerald's sake, to eat mutton broth and poultice his chest ; how the mourners wept and drank sherry and ate up all the cakes ; how he had two new suits of black clothes which were kept in a drawer while he wore his coloured ones as usual except on fine Sundays : how he had found it all very dreary, and how he used to cry at night because he missed his mother, who, he thought, was ugly, but good ; how

he used to infer, for that reason, that devils and other evil creatures were probably handsome, because they were not good. Then, with another wave of memory, he saw again the thin stark body, so tranquil, so awfully tranquil, under the white sheet, and his eyes filled with tears. Then he remembered the footsteps of the undertaker's men, and the screwing down of the coffin-lid, and how he could never pass the door again where that dreadful work was done without a shiver.

"Chookie ! chookie !" exclaimed Miss Leddle, still absorbed in her moping drake. "Chookie ! chookie !"

No ; he did not want her to die. It was a horrible thing that the possession of so small a treasure as a little house with a poultry-yard should have to come to him through the cruelties of death. And, after all, he would not like any house after the memories of a family funeral—it would be quite spoilt for him. No ; he did not want her to die. The remedy suggested by Coolidge was a gamble, no doubt, but the winnings to be gained, if all went well, were considerable. The Franton Manor estate was to be bought at a nominal price by a small private syndicate and developed into a thriving coal district. Coolidge had already, under the oath of secrecy, approached Colonel Howland, Mr Sarramy and Mr Lux on the subject ; he had given them no names, no details, and no facts, but he had roused in them an eager appetite for dead-certain fifty-per-cent. dividends. Gerald was to see

Miss Tredegar on the following Thursday and begin, with due caution, the necessary negotiations. It seemed to him, as he considered the matter, that the gods were now working in his favour, for, if Jennie went to Franton, her influence would be useful in inducing Miss Tredegar to sell her property. He went back to the house determined to prepare Jennie's mind for that mission. He called her, in his agreeable voice, from the foot of the stairs. She came down, a little pale, more subdued and more beautiful after her tears.

"I'm tired of being idle and alone," said he; "besides, as you are going to leave us, won't you spend the rest of the last morning with me? There's a whole half-hour before lunch. Come and walk in the paddock. I'll lend you my felt hat."

His light grey Homburg hat hung on a peg in the hall; she put it on, studied herself seriously in the mirror, and said she looked frightful. But they started at once for the paddock.

"This," he said abruptly, "is probably the only real happiness I shall ever know!"

"What do you mean?"

"No one in the world could ever be to me what you have been. You believe that—don't you?"

"Of course I believe it," she answered lightly; "why shouldn't I believe it? I cannot feel flattered. No one matters very much to you."

"For God's sake, don't talk that way. The

moment I feared and yet longed for is here—I am caring too much. That's the most faithful word I ever spoke. I have waited a weary long time for you, but you have come. And I sha'n't change—no, not even if you change. Old or young, or sick or well, or happy or sad, you are the one woman for me, dear. If I were a king and had my choice out of the whole world, I'd say, 'This is my queen ; this is my joy ; this is my lady and my love.' My devotion to you is the one good thing that ever happened in my life."

Jennie did not hear all he said—she was too troubled ; her feelings were stirred indescribably ; but, whatever it was, she thought it would have called her back from the grave.

"I thought," she said faintly, "I thought we were talking in fun."

"But you must have known this was coming. You did not suppose that I came here day after day just to ask after Aunt Daisy's sciatica ? Can't you feel what I have to say—what I must say ? I haven't the right to say it, because I have nothing to offer. It's a question of pounds, shillings and pence. But, never fear, I'll get the money somehow. I swear it. I don't want you to make sacrifices and live in misery, but I do want you for my wife. Don't answer me quickly. I want you, and till I die I'll want you. If you care for me even half as much as I care for you, I'll be satisfied. It isn't your love I'm

asking for—it's you yourself. Girls can't love as men love—it wouldn't be right if they did."

"I cannot answer you now," said Jennie. "I cannot! Have you counted the consequences of all this?"

Her lip was quivering, and she dared not look at him.

"I'm mad with love for you," answered Federan, "but I have counted the consequences. For weal or woe, I'm yours."

"Love to me," said the girl, "has a much more serious meaning than it may have for you. If I once gave it, I might not be able to take it back, and then—don't you see—"

She could not finish the sentence.

"Have you given me any? Have you given me a little?" he asked eagerly.

"I don't know. Please let me go in. I don't know."

"Have I made you unhappy?"

"I don't know," she repeated.

"Will you dance with me to-night?"

The simpler question was a relief, and she was able to throw him a quick glance which had something in it of her original audacity.

"Oh yes; I'll dance a quadrille with you!"

Then they both laughed.

"I'm not coming in to dinner," he said. "I am going to meet Coolidge."

"He's a great friend of yours?"

"The cleverest man I know, and in some ways the noblest. The tragedy of his life was his marriage, and then—he's a gambler. It is hereditary. He can't help it."

"They say—*Lucky at cards, unlucky in love and friendship*. Do you believe that?"

She seemed to be dreaming that she spoke: her real being was still fast bound in the enchantment of Federan's declaration.

"He has been unlucky in his choice of a wife. She's for ever in tears and she wears blue flannel jackets. She had some money. Give me your hand."

She was stepping over some small logs which the gardener had been chopping up for firewood. Without hesitation, she gave Federan her hand, but after she had done so she remembered vividly some of the things they had been saying to each other a few moments before.

"Too late!" he exclaimed, observing and understanding her sudden embarrassment. "What you have once given, you know, you are not able to take back!"

His face lit up with the pride of mastership, and he had never before looked so handsome, because he had never before been so happy.

"How do you know I want it back?" said Jennie, snatching it away and running swiftly, as though she

were being blown along by the breeze, toward the house.

The picture of her that day in her violet-coloured dress running past him over the grass sprinkled with daisies remained with Federan all his life; the slight pressure of her small white hand had burnt like a seal into his palm; the scent of the perfume she used seemed sweeter than all the summers of the earth. No money could buy such a picture or such emotions as he felt then. A truer instinct than he commonly heeded warned the young man that the very discipline of poverty makes the heart and spirit and body strong for love. It is the poor who know the intensity of human affection—the poor and patient who have to labour and toil for that price to the uttermost farthing which ransoms the simplest delight.

Miss Daisy, at the meal table, was in a sarcastic mood. She had encountered the village dressmaker, and heard many rumours about the ball.

“Many have been invited,” she declared, “for the pleasure of watching the County dance! There’ll be a rope drawn across the room—they pretend it makes more space. It is really put there to separate one lot from another. Young women go to balls to catch partners for life!” She laughed prettily at her own jest, and for a moment a bright reflection of her youth seemed to fall on her faded face. “There’s no need to look for men. One takes a husband nowadays as one takes a house—according to one’s income.

Poor Sally Always can't afford more than half-a-crown a week ; Rachel Tredegar can offer her two thousand a year. As for me, I wouldn't give a groat to any man alive to bear me company for so much as half a day. I'd sooner have his room than his company."

This speech was not uttered with bitterness. She disliked men just as she disliked horses and cows ; she considered them stupid, uncertain and naturally ferocious. The idea of love-making filled her with horror ; she would turn her head away in unfeigned disgust from courting couples.

"Explain it !" she would say to her elder sister—who could never explain it, although the phenomenon in question did not offend her taste so much as it excited her sense of humour. In the poultry-yard she had learnt a good deal about humanity's frailties. Moping drakes and enamoured swains had much in common, she knew.

"Miss Mavers has some new false teeth for the ball," observed Miss Liddle ; "and Mrs Howland's grey evening body has been dyed a lovely lavender, but she'll wear her new mantle over it because of her cold."

The twinkle in Miss Liddle's eye made it abundantly clear that she was not deceived by Mrs Howland's cold. The mantle was handsome, and some reason had to be found for wearing it in the ballroom.

"Where's Gerald ?" said Miss Daisy, suddenly.

Jennie blushed, and told them that he had gone to meet Coolidge.

"Mark my words," said Miss Leddle, with solemnity: "the day he first met Coolidge was an evil day for him. Gerald's own father dismissed Coolidge from his office. It's a bad thing to keep friendly with the enemies of one's own flesh and blood. They will work their malice none the less."

Jennie's heart sank at these sinister words, and her throat seemed to close.

"Gerald can be led," said Miss Daisy: "there he takes after his mother. She was the unhappiest of women. She followed her fancies wherever they took her. At last, she had a fancy for death. I can see her now, as I look back, sitting and reading poetry instead of doing needlework. My sister and I," she added, looking toward Miss Leddle, "made all Gerald's clothes till he was put into knickerbockers. But Emmeline hated sewing. She would sit, as I tell you, and look across the street at the windows opposite. Mr Federan's house is on the high street on account of his business. 'The trees ought to be coming out now,' she'd say; or else, 'I haven't seen a sunset for ever so long'; or else, 'People who are discontented are to be pitied, not blamed.' She went on so, that Mr Federan offered at last to change his place of residence and move out into the country. 'It isn't worth while,' said she:

‘haven’t I a new wall-paper with roses on it?’ When she was dying she put up her hand to gather those very roses off the wall. She followed a fancy to the last.”

“My poor father’s dying words were : ‘If I fall asleep, take care of the candle,’” said Miss Leddle ; “that will show you, Jennie, that there is some sense all the same in our family !”

CHAPTER VII

“When the Nicene Emperor Vataces presented to his Empress a crown of diamonds and pearls, he informed her with a smile that this precious ornament arose from the sale of the eggs of his innumerable poultry. . . . The lesson was still more useful than the revenue.”

GIBBON.

AT nine o'clock that night the ladies of Cumbersborough and Franton were standing in rows before the several mirrors placed in the cloak-room at the Town Hall. Some were arranging their hair; others were powdering their cheeks and noses; some were absorbed in the ecstatic contemplation of their own reflections; some were pinning up torn flounces; others were missing buttons from their gloves; many were talking, giggling, whispering comments about each other, and offering loud compliments to their respective intimate friends. Smiles of reassurance were on nearly every countenance as it became evident that no girl could claim to be the beauty of the ball. The pretty ones were as pretty as ever, the plain ones were no plainer than usual, but, on the contrary, much improved by the unaccustomed excitement. On these

occasions the least attractive, from whom no glory is hoped for, are frequently a surprising success, and the belles are often a disappointment—too much is expected from them. It was a glad moment when Miss Charlotte Gillespie remarked that Miss Lilian Arbuthnot's serene brow had been sadly disfigured by a wasp-bite, and Miss Isabel Barker, whose arms were thin, had the pleasure of sympathising with Miss Jessie Hammond over the misery of a plump cheek considerably swollen by toothache. Miss Ada Bampton created a slight chill of uneasiness among the company by wearing a new primrose silk gown (which came from London), and a locket with *Mizpah* on it in seed pearls. But, on the whole, when the band struck up the first bars of the Lancers, everyone felt self-satisfied, good-humoured and entitled to an evening's enjoyment. There were a number of young men—including a few officers who had been invalided home and sent to Cumborough; the floor was capital; the supper-room, decorated with flags and garlands and made to look as much as possible like a restaurant, was full of little tables (an innovation)—one constantly said to one's partner or one's mother, "Have you seen the supper-room? Such a transformation! It has never been so well arranged before." In all the corridors there were large tubs full of geraniums and ferns; in the tent there were coloured fairy lights and quiet corners for conversation; guests

were not supposed to use the staircase which led on to the roof, but it was not shut off, and it was sufficiently illuminated for those who wished to study the sky during the course of two vales or so.

All these highly satisfactory details had been noted by those whom they most concerned, the Lancers had just ended, and the first bars of *Amoureuse* were being played, when a superb, disconcerting couple were seen entering the ball-room. They advanced towards Mrs Howland and her select party, and they were recognised—at first with delight because beauty is irresistible, and afterwards with rage because beauty is too rare—as Jennie Sussex and young Federan. So splendidly matched a pair would have made any assembly in any surroundings somewhat bitter; and although there is an acknowledged inequality in the distribution of gifts, a limit is fixed to the endurance of those whose modest allotments have to be accepted with Christian fortitude or explained by Pagan philosophy. Time teaches the disconsolate that, if backs are fitted to burdens, apparent blessings come heavily weighted with adversity; hence many, on observing things too enviable for their weakness, gather strength from the hope that certain wonders are too good to be true. Jennie and Federan produced this comforting impression on the greater number of those who had been cruelly startled by the first sight of such romantic lovers. Lovers they were beyond question :

the new absorbing influence which had come into their lives separated them utterly from those looking on ; to them the decorated hall full of people seemed a distant vision watched from some great height ; they saw forms moving, but they were far away ; they heard a murmuring, but it seemed no louder than the drone of insects ; their ears caught the sound of the music, but it was neither so sweet nor so intoxicating as the passionate rhythm of their own thoughts.

When Jennie's eyes encountered Mrs Howland's, it was like the sun shining on granite. Agatha Howland stared at Jennie's white neck, and observed that her arms were not red above the elbows ; she would not allow herself to admire Jennie's dress, but she became dissatisfied with her own, and she moved away lest her partner, a young subaltern who was convalescent after influenza, might ask to be presented to Miss Sussex. Federan, however, placed his arm round Jennie's waist, she put her hand lightly on his shoulder, and the two, smiling, silent and ecstatic, joined the other whirling couples till the music ceased, when they found themselves a little giddy and very much oppressed by the presence of so many people. They had driven together in a hooded gig from Miss Leddle's to the Town Hall—a journey of three miles by brilliant moonlight. In passing the grounds of Franton Manor they had noticed the peacocks, with their

tails hanging down like dusky banners, asleep in the trees, and Federan had said he would sooner walk in the woods than go to the greatest ball ever given. For a moment—so strong was the spell of the June night and so seductive the call from the green solitude, that they had almost decided to alight, tie the horse to a gatepost, and wander under the elms.

"We sha'n't be missed," Federan had said persuasively: "it's such a chance to enjoy the earth in peace."

"Can't we go there some other evening?"

"No: other nights we should meet a lot of yokels and their lasses." He had often wandered there himself with the pretty daughter of a dairyman, and the recollection of that chapter in his career made his face glow uncomfortably. "Besides, how could you get away from the Tredegars? Ah, come! It is our last chance. You're not afraid, are you? Besides, where's the harm?"

"There's no harm. And I have always wanted to walk through a wood at night—as goose-girls do in fairy stories—and lose my way and find a diamond crown."

"Then come with me!"

He pulled up the horse and looked ardently into the girl's sparkling eyes. The road in front of them was deserted, but they heard the rumble of wheels behind them.

"Drive on! drive on!" said Jennie, suddenly afraid of her own recklessness. "Did you think I meant to do anything so mad? Drive on! Don't let those people pass us."

She herself, as she spoke, jerked the reins, and, leaning past Federan, seized the whip, which, in her agitation, she used so sharply on the animal's back that he broke into a gallop.

"That is mad, if you like," exclaimed Federan: "Don't you know that we are on the top of a hill?"

The horse was a young colt who had been out twice only before in harness, and, thoroughly terrified by the unfamiliar touch on the reins and the unexpected sting of the cord, he rushed at full speed down the most dangerous bit of road in the county.

Jennie closed her eyes, held her breath, and thought, "We shall die together."

"If you had been with any other driver, my lady," said Federan, presently, "there would have been no more dancing for you in this world."

Then she saw that his face was as grey as ashes.

"I'm very sorry," she said, pulling his sleeve lightly.

They did not speak after that, and although they had entered the ball-room together, no further word was uttered from the time of the wild gallop down the hill till they had ended the first waltz. During the dance each had been conscious that the feeling of anger between them had added a savage, almost cruel,

joy to the familiarity of spinning together in a conventional embrace round a crowded ball-room while the band played. He had never been so close to her before, and he had never before touched her waist. An idea—or was it a sensation?—came to him while they were dancing, that it would be good to go round and round that way with Jennie for an eternity till they reached the height of some bottomless abyss, and then to sink and sink for another eternity, never knowing whether the passion urging him on was too wild a love or too vehement a hate. The knowledge that, in order to win her, he would have to do violence to the habits of indolence and selfishness, which he had heretofore unscrupulously indulged, made him resent her power even while he yielded to it.

“I wonder,” he said abruptly, “whether the man who ruined himself to buy the pearl of great price ever came to detest the sight of the pearl. To possess one perfect thing means great happiness, no doubt, but a number of imperfect things gives one more choice, more variety, more liberty in living, and they are less responsibility.”

Jennie could not understand this utterance, because she did not know the dreary and dishonest schemes with regard to the Franton estate which were growing daily stronger in Federan’s mind. She did not know that he was mortgaging his conscience in order to make the money which he considered indispensable

to the most ordinary kind of domestic contentment. She did not know the painful throbs of misgiving which accompanied all the pleasure he took in her companionship. While she was asking herself what his strange words meant, Allan Helmyng, the drawing-master at Mrs Marblay's, came timidly to her side and asked for a dance. He was a delicate young man who had won three medals at the Royal Academy Schools, and broken down from overwork in London air. His mother was the widow of a captain in the merchant service; she lived in a little villa at Cumbersborough, where she looked on to the sea and designed humorous menu cards for a Court stationer in Bond Street.

Helmyng and his mother adored Miss Sussex, and estranged many of their useful neighbours by refusing to see any fault in the lovely creature. She promised him a polka, whereupon several other men from Cumbersborough, observing his good luck, were civil to him in order to get an introduction to Jennie. She had now been twenty minutes in the ball-room, and her success was indisputable: but she read the penalty of her triumph in every face she passed.

"Let us go out into the old playground," said Federan: "I know the way."

The Town Hall was next to the Parochial School of St Matthew, and the playground, illuminated with Chinese lanterns, had been thrown open as a sort of promenade between the dances. It was still

so early that no one had yet acquired sufficient self-assurance to brave the jeopardy of this equivocal paradise.

Jennie and Federan walked round it till they came to the swing, which had a seat just wide enough for two. When, therefore, Mrs Puddifant looked out of the window of the council-room, to which she had retired for the purpose of inspiring the local reporter of the *Frampshire Times and Cumbersborough Herald*, she beheld a girl and a man swinging together in the moonlight. Their laughter floated toward her ears.

"Dear me!" she said: "can you recognise them, Mr Whiston?"

"It is young Federan," said Whiston: "I'd know the fine shape of his figure a mile off; and the lady, unless I am greatly mistaken, is Miss Sussex."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mrs Puddifant, with every evident sign of believing him: "how could it be Miss Sussex? She wouldn't do such an odd thing, would she?"

"'Tis Miss Sussex, for all that," replied Whiston; "She's long from the knees down, and almost as long again from the knees up. My eye is all for build. I can hardly be mistaken in a build."

This seemed rather indelicate to Mrs Puddifant, whose figure was not all it had been in some respects, and very much more than it had been in others. She pulled down the blind and said, with an air which she described later as one of *hauteur*: "You can say that

my train has a foundation of broché with raised azaleas in velvet. My daughter's dress is of blue tulle; her ornaments are simple wild flowers."

Federan was now asking Jennie why she laughed at him whenever he tried to tell her that he loved her.

"It's cruel to doubt me," he protested, "and I'm at a loss how to convince you."

"You think you love me. What would happen to me if I believed you?"

"I can't well say, but I should want the belief to make you happy. It would do so if you cared for me. I'm afraid you do not care for me."

"Yes, I do."

"But how much?"

"Oh, well, a great deal. Enough, at least, to sit out here in a swing with you, when I might be dancing with the little fat captain."

"If this could be my last moment of life, Jennie, I'd be glad to die," he said, with a sombre look, "just as we are."

"You didn't think so when we were galloping down-hill in the gig!"

"That would have been horrible and violent. But here it is calm; I can see the stars, and all men are the better for looking at them—far better than for any of the vain things they are apt to take glory in. Many a man's love has been a curse to him. Before this, I have given much liking to the wrong persons,

and I have lived and acted each time as though I had pitched upon a dish fit for the gods. Yet, under it all, I always knew that I was indulging a bias of fancy. But the human heart pines till it can find some excuse for playing the fool."

"I won't dispute that with you."

"Yet the real sighs and the sleepless nights, the real misery and anguish one suffers over these false affairs!"

"Nothing is utterly false. A sham jewel is genuine paste; it may not be what it passes for, but it is, nevertheless, something that has a fine colour and shines."

"I used to repeat 'my dear love! my dear love!' to myself over and over again about a girl I dared not look at carefully. And I used to stand on the heath alone in storms, and call, 'Come! O come! I want you!' to another girl who always tired me when I met her, although I hated to own it. I am telling you about things now that I have never confided to a living soul. You can judge for yourself how little I wish to deceive you. There's a saying of Seneca's, 'I will discover to you a philter that has neither drug, nor simple, nor enchantment in it: love, if you would raise love.' If that be true, and I hope it is, you ought to know that this time I am truly taken—body, mind and soul, and you ought to give me your love in return. Or," he added, studying her enigmatic face, "trust me. Tell me something about

your own thoughts. You are the only woman that ever puzzled me. I never troubled to ask what any other one thought. Indeed, the less they said the longer my fondness lasted. When the end came, it was always because of some saying that opened my eyes."

"When I love, it will be with my eyes open."

"Then you would be too soon undeceived, perhaps. A discerning woman would find few men worthy."

"But if she loved, in spite of her discernment as you call it, there would be no hope of her changing, poor soul. After twenty years of reflection, she would be no wiser than when she was first caught. If I were a man, I'd pray for the love of the discerning."

"But as you're a woman—"

"I'd pray for the love of a man who saw me well and then became immediately blind! It wouldn't be necessary for him too see anybody else! Now I have given you a glimpse at least of my mood. The worst is, I am not likely to change it. My fault is jealousy. Had you guessed it?"

"I may have wondered what made your character as fascinating as your face. Now you have told me the secret. Jealousy is the bitter-sweet that gives you that long, doubting look. Don't doubt me, but be jealous. It will save me from being quite a fool about you. It's bad when a woman is too calm and

secure. I'd sell my soul to know for certain that I could break your heart."

She touched the ground with the tip of her toes and swung once or twice to and fro.

"Your love-making is double-edged," she said at last.

"Do you compare mine with that of other men?" asked Federan, scornfully. "It's hard to know what others say to women, but each has his hour of satisfaction when there is any talk of what girls will accept as gospel! Disdain like yours isn't common. It would throw a damp on the boldest nature."

"So you find me disdainful! I am all humility. I cannot believe that I could call out this devotion you describe. Nor do I think you have such devotion to offer."

She was half in earnest, and the truth under the words which she had meant in raillery struck her after she had uttered them, as a certain kind of fallen twig will if one steps upon it.

"I may not describe it rightly," he admitted, "or you may understand it in some other sense than I mean it; I am no master of words. When I speak of love, I don't know whether it is a good or an evil. If it has been the salvation, it has also been the undoing of many. So we won't call it devotion, because it is often selfishness. I feel that I can't live without you, and I want to live. This is why I endure your pride and your laughter. I am determined to win you round."

"I must be a very good actress," she said thoughtfully.

"In what way?"

"In every way."

But the music had stopped, and a few couples, having seen the pair in the swing, ventured into the playground.

"My next dance is with Allan Helmyng," said Jennie, rising; "and the one after is with Major Winton."

"Throw them both over," said Federan, eagerly, "and come for a drive with me. There is no peace here. It is our last evening. No one will miss us."

"I must keep my promise to Allan Helmyng."

"Besides, Coolidge is now at home with my aunts. He has promised to play dummy whist with them and amuse them. We can take a long drive." By this time they were on the threshold of the entrance-hall. "I'll harness the pony myself—the stable-boys are all drinking. We can get away by ourselves, and see St Wilfred's Church by moonlight."

St Wilfred's was a ruin about nine miles off, on the way to Cumbersborough. People who are wise in time over one form of recklessness are often carried by the original strength of the temptation into some other far worse imprudence. Jennie's excitement had reached a high pitch, and the proud but passionate girl believed that she had so impressed Federan by her assumed frigidity that she could

venture to indulge her sudden desire for a wild drive alone with him across the country.

"One couldn't have a better night for seeing the view," she said, gazing with unconcern and a beating heart at the stars.

"Then dance with Helmyng, and meet me at the side-door afterwards. I'll be waiting there with the trap for you."

"St Wilfred's," she said steadily, "was built in the eleventh century. I confess you tempt me. I do not care for balls, whereas a drive on a June evening is perfect."

This frankness, she hoped, would also be disarming.

"Here is Helmyng now," said Federan, who was flushed, delighted and surprised. "I know you will keep your word to me—if you are so resolved not to break it to him."

She smiled, and Helmyng, who was advancing gladly toward her, found her eyes as deep as wells and as softly inscrutable as dark flowers. Yet a little shiver of anguish passed through him, because he had the poet's dolorous instinct for the subtle. A less sensitive man would have taken Jennie's glance for himself. Helmyng knew better—and he caught the after-look as one catches the echoed last bar of a long song.

CHAPTER VIII

“He who far off beholds another dancing, and all the time
Hears not the music that he dances to,
Thinks him a madman.”

CALDERON.

HELMYNG, as he watched Federan leave the ball-room, could not resist saying, “What a fine head! Artists are often blamed nowadays when they choose handsome models, or make handsome people appear so on canvas. They are accused of vulgarity—as though beauty and right proportions could ever be vulgar. Vulgarity is a matter of expression. For instance, who ever saw it in the face of the dead? No corpse is vulgar; perhaps because it can no longer pretend.”

He had been wondering whether there was not something a little common and gorgeous about Federan—a coarseness which might develop later. But the idealism which made his moral languor seem a thread in his tragic destiny, rather than a fault he could control, had also transfigured his countenance, giving it the ominous melancholy which comes from a mind that thinks in bitterness and self-condemnation—when it thinks at all.

"If I were asked to design a romantic hero," added Helmyng, "I'd draw Federan. But he ought to wear a coat of mail and a winged helmet—he is modern by mistake."

Jennie seized the remark as an excuse for gazing after Federan till he was out of sight. Then she turned to Helmyng and said, as they joined the dancers, "I wonder, each time I see him, where he came from. I can never get used to his appearance."

Although she danced, the musicians, she thought, had lost their spirit: the garish light made everyone look haggard and grotesque: the chattering, murmuring, laughing crowd disturbed her mood and broke in upon her secret happiness, as noise affects the dream of a tired sleeper. It does not rouse him fully, but it sends a shaft of discomfort through his rest and changes a soft vision into a strident nightmare. Many of the girls were flushed and smiling; their partners, panting and dizzy, were grinning affably as a substitute for conversation. A large, heated group were pushing, elbowing and hastening toward the buffet, where loud complaints of mismanagement suddenly filled the air. The iced lemonade had failed.

"There will be a fresh supply," Colonel Howland was announcing; "half a gallon was spilled by an accident."

Some looked incredulous; some said rather loudly, "That's all very well;" and the couples who, a

minute before, had been staring with celestial sweetness into each other's eyes, glared like hungry animals, and became too sullen, from trifling thirst, to remember the ill effects of bad temper even on the finest features.

The chaperons were huddled together in a corner out of the draught, but although they maintained a steady fire of comments on everyone present, each was privately engrossed in watching the progress of her own daughter or daughters; each fumed and shifted uneasily when she saw an ineligible man pass by; each pretended when partners were scarce that her girl had a weak chest, and was only allowed an occasional round dance; each told the other stories about the few marriageable men in the room, and all condemned the indiscretion of Miss Sussex.

"As I was saying, she has turned Gerald Federan's head!" Mrs Marblay would remark at intervals, whenever every other topic seemed on the verge of exhaustion. This utterance never failed to stimulate flagging malice, and the matrons would pluck up fresh courage for a further dissertation on the fast young women of London society.

"Give me," cried Mrs Puddifant, "a well-brought-up true country girl. People who go down well enough in London can't get, thank God, into county circles."

Mrs Puddifant thanked God so much and so often for the social laws which she herself invented, that

she was looked upon as a very good sort of person—a little loud, perhaps, but with her heart in the right place. She seemed, indeed, the privileged child of Providence, so intimate was her apparent knowledge of the Divine policy toward her fellow-creatures. Whenever Mrs Puddifant declared that “Heaven would not allow it,” she carried as much weight as the Chief Constable of Franton on the precise amount of elasticity in the Early-Closing and the Game Laws.

“Romance seems to have died out in England,” said Helmyng; “there is no great love poetry read or written now, and the men who imitated Tennyson, George Meredith, Swinburne and Browning belong already to the old school. Perhaps women have lost much of their mystery, and so they have ceased to be inspiring. People are anxious enough to love, I believe. But to love well is a career in itself, and the men who have the time lack the nature, and those who might have the nature work for money till they have neither feelings nor thoughts: they become machines.”

Although Helmyng was hardly more than five-and-twenty, he seemed to have renounced every hope of joy in this life. The first impression of his face was one of delicate suffering, and when he lowered his eyelids their long lashes threw a shadow on his emaciated cheeks. But a mad and destructive energy seemed to beat behind his strong brow, and the lines

around his mouth betrayed a self-repression carried to cruel extremes. The mask of a cautious provincial concealed his famishing, vindictive self, and there was, in certain of his wild, swift, furtive glances, the look of a forest beast in bonds. A fellow-student at the Academy Schools had called him a satyr without pipes: he could neither play music nor scamper with his kind; his whole existence was one of those conveniently described by others as wasted. It often seemed, in his moods of despair, that he lived in perpetual and mean struggle with the whole of mankind; the constant, unnecessary dissimulation of his real sentiments gave him an exaggerated estimate of his own merit, and a wayward contempt for his associates: "truth in all the world is both hated and believed," was a quotation ever on his lips, and his rare laughter was reserved for his one bitter amusement of paying ironical deference to the imbecilities of the human race. As he praised Federan, he watched Jennie's impassioned face, and he thought, "Does she suppose I really admire that oiled and curled Assyrian bull?"

Nevertheless he loved her the more because he could despise her folly. It soothed the eternal ache of his pride to think that she was as unconsciously gross and weak as most women—led by the senses though pursuing what she took to be an ideal.

"Silly, beautiful creature!" he said to himself, and he was no longer afraid of her.

He still trembled ; he still bowed his head when she made the most trivial remark ; he still touched her waist timidly as they danced down the hall. But his imagination had grown bolder : he thought, " We are made of the same clay after all."

He smiled slyly under his rigid mask by way of affirming this new strange intimacy with her heart. A tenderness he had never before experienced came over his spirit : for once he felt at peace with the crowd—perhaps he had caught the pleasure, in an exquisite, vague, indefinite form, of their more vulgar, wholly sensual sympathies.

When they reached the door Jennie said, with a blush, " I don't care to dance any more. Mr Federan is waiting to drive me home. Will you come out with me?"

He offered her his arm, having determined now to accept her infatuation as the mockery and discipline of his own. The band was still playing ; the corridor was deserted ; and the gas, which was always lowered for economy's sake during the dances, gave a melancholy sallow light. But through the opened door they could see the dark blue sky filled with bright stars, the shuttered houses opposite, and a little way off, down the road, Federan standing by his horse and gig. Helmyng felt Jennie's hand tighten on his arm : she pressed closer to him, as though she were half afraid, and yet she walked more quickly than he.

"You haven't your cloak yet," said Helmyng.

"Then tell him I'm coming. I'll get my cloak."

She disappeared before he could offer to accompany her, and the young man found himself suddenly alone with a suffocating jealousy. He was standing, just as she had left him, when she returned wearing a shawl over her shoulders and a white lace scarf wound round her head and face. Her eyes under the lace shone with a brilliant, almost violent charm. She had thrown her train over her arm, and the lace petticoat underneath, which fell a little below her ankles, was so light that, as she moved, it fluttered in the summer breeze. Helmyng noticed her small embroidered shoes and her arched instep.

"Don't tell anyone," she whispered. "I know it's wrong, but I want to go—I must go."

She signalled to Federan, and, smiling, hastened out to him. Helmyng, stifling a cry of despair, heard her flying step on the gravel, Federan's low voice; saw him help her into the gig, saw him mount the box and drive away towards Cumbersborough. Then he caught sight of his own wan face and wasted form in a mirror: he too was young, but with what a youth—over-worked, warped, unlovely! It was more than he could bear. He hated Federan—he hated Jennie.

"I was happy enough till I met her," he told himself, although he knew this was a lie. He had never been happy. Still, he repeated the falsehood and

crept away, murmuring it, not to weep but to hide his agony.

"We'll take the longest road," Federan said to Jennie: "past the old tollgate and the riverside walk."

She made no reply, and neither of them spoke for some minutes. Each was afraid lest someone should call them back: they held their breath, and Gerald peered anxiously from right to left as he drove in order to assure himself that the street was deserted.

"This was the right thing to do," he said, at last; "it humiliates me to be in a crowd."

They were still on the high road, and the shining rails of the electric tramway lay before them like long placid serpents stretched out in the moonlight. Far off a solitary man was proceeding in the direction of the Church lanes. Jennie started when she saw him, for there was something curiously familiar in his gait. She stared fascinated and almost terrified.

"Is that somebody?" she asked in a nervous voice.

"No one in particular," answered Federan.

"It is a man, then?"

"What did you think he was? A ghost?"

"Yes, I thought I knew him."

"Impossible. It's a stranger."

She said no more, but continued watching the figure as it drew nearer.

"We'll pass him," said Federan; "he's a disturb-

ing element. How pale you look all of a sudden ! He has frightened you."

As they reached the wayfarer, he halted and called out, "Am I right for Franton?"

Jennie cowered and drew her veil tighter.

"Quite right," said Federan.

"Thank you," replied the man, and the next moment he was hurrying on in the dust of their wheels.

"I was right, I knew him," said Jennie, who was trembling with an inexplicable agitation. "I know him. It's John Harlowe. And I let him pass without a word—my old friend. I let him pass without one single word. I hid my face. Where has he come from? Why is he here?"

"Shall we turn back?" asked Federan, sarcastically. He stopped the horse; he studied her distressed countenance, and grew livid with suspicion.

"Shall we turn back?" he repeated. "Yes or no? He can drive you—if he *can* drive. I'll walk. Yes or no?"

"We can do no good by changing our plans," she faltered. "We don't know where he's going."

"Oh, the hypocrisy! He's on his way to see you. I know that, although I don't know him."

"He couldn't have any intention of calling at this hour."

"Then we may as well go on. But I swear you shall decide:—which is it, yes or no?"

They were now close to a winding road edged with old lime-trees. The sweet odour of the leaves and the fields beyond filled the air ; the caressing wind brought with it the stolen perfume of honeysuckle and roses ; above the stillness a practised ear could detect the fuming strain of the sea striking the beach on the Cumbers borough coast, and, at fixed intervals, white shafts like milky wings spread across the sky above the Cumbersborough lighthouse. Federan waited impatiently for the girl's reply, and was about to repeat his question, when he felt her cool, light hand steal into his and as gently steal away. The movement was so childlike, appealing, unsought, that at the touch no feeling or desire seemed left in him except that deceptive, passionless, languorous adoration for the woman which is but a brief mood and to which all the illusions of platonic love are due. He drove on, although he slackened the horse's speed and drew Jennie's hand once more into his own. This time hers trembled and fluttered like a caught fledgling. She was, at the moment, far less calm than he. The sight of Harlowe had made her realise how greatly she had changed since their last meeting. Now she had a new knowledge of gladness—a gladness which came burdened with something like guiltiness, and something like terror ; it was a peril, a menace, an awakening and a privilege : the insidious inheritance left by the first of the happy and the first of the sinners. She doubted no more that

she loved and was loved in return, and the acute need of living—to the full, to the bitterest, to the hardest, and to the most joyous — dominated her with a mastery beyond the understanding, or suspicion, or conception of Federan. Women love more wildly and intensely than men, because they lead purer lives and are more ignorant of those crude physical laws the half-knowledge of which vitiates so much modern psychology. If men lived, as a rule, as most women live, they too would place love first in their existence. Passion, like the sun-ray which consumes a flower and merely stimulates a weed, burns fiercely in the innocent, although it affords the experienced an occasion only for amused self-introspection. This is why that April unconscious poetry of life known as first love is touched with an irresistible charm which will sweetly haunt memories the least accessible to dreams and bend natures the most stubborn before beauty.

“I thought Harlowe was in West Africa,” said Jennie, presently.

“Are you thinking of *him*?” exclaimed Federan.

“I was thinking how I have changed since he went away.”

“Did you ever love him?”

“Never.”

“Could you ever love him?”

She answered quickly, but with a cold voice, while the hand he was holding became stony, “Never.”

“Have you the gift of loving, Jennie?”

"I am afraid it has been denied me."

"I believe that," said the young man, sighing with a melancholy which was entirely feigned. All lovers are instinctive comedians: their words and their actions, whether on the heroic-tragic or the idyllic-pathetic scale, are always mere improvisations, preludes, symbols, or, what is called in music, a *cadenza* in the great concerto, the passages *a piacere*, interrupting the solemn air.

"Your one fault," continued Federan, venturing to put his disengaged arm round the rail of her seat. They had reached a few yards of newly-mended road, and the stones were not yet rolled.

"Do you mind my loving you?" he asked; "does it displease you? And yet I can't help it, even if you are displeased. Forgive me all the same. But I'm talking nonsense. Why shouldn't you love me in return?"

"I don't know why I shouldn't."

"Let me look into your eyes, then. You keep me at such a distance! The moment I loved you I ceased to be an acquaintance. I'm your lover—I ought, therefore, to look into your eyes and find what I can. That's my one poor privilege."

She laughed, and although they had now passed the rough piece in the road he kept his arm on the rail.

"You could only see what I chose to show in my eyes. If I wished, I could make them empty. It might mean," she added, "a little trouble."

“Why—trouble?”

“Because I do like you,” she said naïvely.

The light, now ruby-red, now topaz-yellow, of the lighthouse glowed in the distance, and an abrupt turn in the leafy lane revealed a sudden view of the sea and the great rocks known as “The Seven Sisters.” These, as they pierced the glassy water, stood up like the risen spectres of barbarous dead gods roughly hewn and long forgotten: they had the semblance of human forms and a grim majesty. In storms they would appear to dance and mix with the fury of the waves—little sprites, without malice; but the calmness of the night made their strength sinister and their immobility terrific: one could imagine them scanning the horizon for prey—the merchant traders, the obscure sailing-boats and fishing-smacks which drifted fatally that way, in certain numbers, every year.

“Then if you like me,” exclaimed Federan, “why can’t you love me?”

Jennie looked past the rocks and turned toward the glittering moon-path which stretched out—a glorious way—as far as the eye could reach.

“You do!” he cried: “Oh, Jennie, you do! My God! you do! I’m not a fool to think so. Wishes come true sometimes. Do you love me? Can you love me?”

His arm was now round her neck and his face was bent down close to her own. When she tried to

answer his question, his lips caught the word. Unresisting, silent, quivering, and stifling with tears she could not shed, in a state as near sorrow as it was far from any describable happiness, she felt her heart beating out in her bosom the measure of her surrender—not to a stronger will—but to an undeniable influence. They rode on bound in a common spell and lost in an intoxicating confusion which neither of them cared to disturb by definite speech or promises. Affection had lent Federan—who was for once subdued by real earnestness—that sure instinct which gives the expression of passionate love all the intensity without the forbidding coldness of self-restraint. He was a practised lover, and, as he had an intuitive appreciation for the timidity, the innocence, the eternal modesty and quickly-roused resentment of pure women, he won the trust of girls as gracefully as he broke in horses, by a constraining charm, never by brutality.

Before they turned homeward, Jennie had promised to become his wife, and he had kissed her face from white to rose and from rose to white again.

CHAPTER IX

“Monsieur, je ne suis qu’une femme, et, par conséquent, mon jugement est peu de chose ; mais il me paraît que les tristesses et les amours de messieurs les auteurs ne ressemblent guère aux tristesses et aux amours des autres hommes.” BAUDELAIRE.

JOHN HARLOWE, as he marched along the road, paused only to refill and light his pipe, and to enjoy some of the charming bits of landscape which made the whole neighbourhood seem—to his eyes, fatigued by the tropical sun—an enchanter’s garden. This was his country, this was his native soil ; the dear England of so many longing hearts and loving toasts ; not the England of the politician’s knavish tricks, but the England of the patriot and the poet, where

“Summer’s hourly-mellowing change
May breathe, with many roses sweet,
Upon the thousand waves of wheat.”

At a farewell dinner given to him by his comrades in West Africa he had used these very words, and rounded his remarks (described as “most eloquent” in the local newspaper) with that particular quotation from *In Memoriam*. He heard again the cheers, the

clinking glasses, the thumps on the table and the stamping on the floor, which had followed his essay into rhetoric. "And they were right," he thought: "how beautiful it is! how peaceful. Thank God I am an Englishman! This is my home!"

The special train which was running from the county town for the ball that night had brought him to Cumbersborough two hours sooner than he expected, and, as he possessed a sanguine temperament, the accident struck him as an omen altogether favourable to his secret hopes—the vagueness of which by no means excluded their intensity. To one of his straightforward disposition, anticipated happiness brought none of that mysterious terror which underlies so often the promise of joy; with his senses entranced by the scene and his reverie, his heart overflowed in gratitude to Providence for what he regarded as peculiar blessings. He had almost worked the youth out of his body, and he had been so near to death that he had caught too much, perhaps, of its tranquillity, but he had received personal congratulations and a gold watch from the firm whose interests he had represented in West Africa; further, they had offered him a considerable appointment as the manager of a large coal district in England. At the moment he was the owner-designate of a good house with a garden and twelve hundred a year. He could now acquiesce serenely when moneyed men were mentioned as those who might marry whom they

pleased ; and the indulgent smile, which had softened all his features when he passed the pair of lovers in the gig, lingered for the rest of the way in his contented gaze. He had not recognised Jennie, but as she drew the lace scarf over her countenance, it was his fate to admire the movement and mistake it for a pretty, instinctive shyness on the part of the unknown girl. (Timidity in women was, in his opinion, their sweetest grace ; he thought it extraordinary that he loved Jennie, who lacked it.) The lace, by the irony of circumstances, was a white mantilla which he himself had brought her some years before as a present from Spain. His dreams, however, were as simple as his actions, so, with Jennie's adored image always shining for him at his journey's end, he might well have passed her blindly a dozen times on the road. The very directness of some natures is their misfortune ; such visions see the world as a neatly-coloured map, and men and women as clear-cut symbols. When the map is found misleading, or the symbols cannot be formed into the desired arabesque, the plain seer curses his own blundering and tries again—never doubting his rules—to make the inexact, exact.

Harlowe, in appearance, was a slight, erect young fellow, of medium height, with an eager, hatchet-shaped face, eyes the colour of tobacco, a prominent nose and a dark moustache. His skin was sunburnt, but the veins showed clearly on his narrow cheek-bones

and gave him a permanent, if deceptive, ruddiness; his teeth were very white, and his hair grew well on his head; even a provincial hair-cutter had not been able to clip out, as it were, bald patches behind his ears or scollops on his temples. This was evident because he had thrust his cap in his pocket. Well-bred, maladroit and sensitive, he was one of those men given to unutterable fineness of feeling and conventional language, who go through life chivalrously, but, in the vulgar judgment, without pleasure for their pains. They have success of a luckless, meritorious kind, or glory without the crown of picturesque accessories. The compassionate had sorrow for Harlowe even at his brightest hour, and, in proclaiming his praises, they would add, "Poor young man!" as a sighing refrain. The fact is that he was too normal, too equable, too sincere for the complicated social system of his own day: his most impatient saying was, "Well, I suppose, it's all part of the day's work"; or, "So many worlds, so much to do, so little done, such things to be": his favourite Canticle was *Nunc dimittis*; as a lover he liked the words of popular love-songs and felt them all—"I'll sing thee songs of Araby," for example; as a man, he read trade journals, the *Times* when he could get it, and, the *Standard* as a rule. His devotion to Jennie had grown in a curious manner. Some women, it is admitted, excite love spontaneously either by their beauty or some evident quality, at first sight: others

have to be studied for months before they seem to possess any charm at all, or show any power in using it. It is seldom, however, that the same woman can produce effects so contrary even on different men ; but Jennie, who had captured Federan at once, had actually displeased Harlowe during the first years of their acquaintanceship. She had reminded him of the gipsies with wild eyes who dwelt in the caves of Granada ; her swinging walk had seemed to him unladylike ; he detested the little mirror which she gazed in constantly and carried attached to the gold chain in her belt ; he thought her habit of powdering the tip of her nose in his presence most Bohemian ; he disapproved of her high heels, her swishing silk petticoats, her passion for novel-reading, and her large feathered hats ; her singing, which stirred all his emotions painfully, was the one thing which made him acknowledge the original taint in mankind ; her reckless curiosity about the problems of life emphasised the terrible contrast he saw between this girl who offended his taste, and his own gentle mother, who wrote to him weekly about her garden, her pigeons, her economies and her rheumatism. One day he accompanied Jennie to the Academy, where they disagreed about every picture they looked at, and he promised himself that he would never willingly go to a public place with her again. People stared at her, and this caused him excruciating annoyance—an annoyance which transcended anything in his

former experience. They had tea together, nevertheless, in a tea-room in Bond Street, and they talked coldly, without catching each other's eyes, about the dampness of the summer, the hopelessness of trying to like absolutely impossible people, and the excellence of toasted buns when they are really light and really hot. Jennie, then, instead of asking him to pass the sugar-bowl, stretched past him and took it herself. Their hands met; he tingled in something like agony from head to foot; the next instant he thought he would have to shoot himself; an instant later he realised that the thunderbolt, the classic eternal thunderbolt, had fallen. He was in love. They had been together in the autumn in Hadley Woods; they had walked in Kew Gardens on many a day in June; they had spent starry twilights on the river, John rowing and she steering; they had passed each other sugar hundreds of times, touched hands hundreds of times, and now, after three years of intimate animosity, in a crowded shop, at a querulous hour, without reason, without warning, with anger in his heart, and *ennui* in her listless attitude, he had to realise that their unsatisfactory relationship had developed, on his side, into a torturing, irresistible, imperious need.

"What's the matter?" she had asked. "Are you tired of fighting?"

She had always liked Harlowe, and had even been accused, by his family, of running after him. In the

first instance, the young man, flattered by an idea which he repudiated, had been drawn to Jennie's side solely by his mother's condemnation of the girl's apparent advances. Few women show the least discernment in their diagnosis of each other's feelings, and men are frequently led into irretrievable dilemmas by listening to the counsel of their female relatives and friends where the love of women is in question. Jennie wrote to Harlowe, accepted his invitations, gave him books, showed anxiety when he caught cold, and wept openly when he went away on long expeditions, because she was not in love with him and therefore had no self-consciousness in showing her affection. Of the two, she had always been the one to make peace after a misunderstanding: she sent several letters in return for any one of his, and she would often say, as much in earnest as in jest, but always without resentment, that he did not appreciate her.

"I get on your nerves, don't I, John?" she would ask placidly; "you think I am detestable. Everything I say and do seems wrong to you. That must be why I adore you so, John dear!"

The ominous calm of the adoration escaped him—escaped him at least until the hour of the thunderbolt. Then, when her eyes met his in sisterly tenderness and she repeated the question, "Are you tired of fighting?" he knew that the fight for him, so far from being ended, had just begun. He was leaving for West Africa that week, and, fearing his success, he

did not venture to press his suit or make any declaration. Had he spoken, it is possible that she might have accepted him: there was no other man between them; she liked him better than anyone else in the world. An engagement would have been a tragic mistake, but it was a mistake she might easily have made. The young of both sexes often take the still happiness of being loved for love itself. Harlowe was good-looking enough and magnetic enough to seem greatly superior to the average run of bridegrooms, and, within the limit of temperate sentimentality, he offered physically and otherwise every excuse for a marriage of affection. His bride could feel that her friends were not wondering why she cared for him. Jennie told herself that he was extremely like Guy Mannering: the day before he sailed she thought she would break her heart if she did not marry him.

He spent that day in shopping and packing; they had fifteen minutes together, and they discussed boot-makers; he did not propose, she did not break her heart; but she cried a little, and conceived a strong repugnance for his photograph. Pretending that it did his expression no justice, she locked it away. It was now at the bottom of her box—under the pile of old school-books in her room at Miss Leddle's. He had written once or twice, but the letter disappointed her; the last one was the best. It came too late, for she read it in Federan's presence on the Sunday before the ball.

Harlowe, by this time, had reached the avenue of tall elms whose linked branches, meeting overhead, were pierced by shafts of moonlight, and formed a covered aisle nearly half a mile long.

"How I am enjoying myself!" he thought; and all sorts of great, indefinable desires passed through his soul. He felt as though he had but to open his arms, spread his wings and fly toward the sky, for delights which did not belong to the earth at all, but to a different, purified, everlasting, rapturous life elsewhere. If the world and the flesh have their voices for men, so, too, the stars and the sea, great mountains and towering trees, have their haunting call.

Presently the flaming gas-lamps of the Franton High Street twinkled in the distance. Harlowe passed a small chapel belonging to the Bible Christians, a brewery, a group of small cottages and a tap. Here he paused to ask the barman the way to Miss Leddle's house. The barman, with the suspicion, caution and inquisitiveness of all provincials, did not answer the question at once, but declared that the Miss Leddles would be in bed and asleep at that hour. Harlowe ordered a glass of beer.

"They may be sitting up for Miss Sussex," observed the man, after a long meditation. "She's gone to the ball."

At this unexpected reference to Jennie, poor Harlowe's pulse began to beat in treble time.

"To-morrow will do," he said, careless. "Can I get a bed here?"

Provincial langour now began to creep through the barman's limbs. He scratched his head, gnawed his fingers, arranged some glasses on the shelf by his side and roused a sleeping cat.

"Yes," he admitted, with evident reluctance; "there's a bed."

He led the way up a creaking staircase to an insupportably musty room, so full of pictures, beaded pin-cushions, articles covered with shell-work, mugs with painted views and frilled curtains, that it seemed to have no other furniture. However, there was a bed, a wash-hand stand, a dressing-table, and a small window which was apparently always closed. The atmosphere had the stale odour of old carpets, old apples and old onions.

"In passing this inn," said the barman, in a new, impressive voice, "Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales's horse cast a shoe. During the delay occasioned by that accident, Her Royal Highness partook of refreshment in this apartment. The tablet above your head to the right describes the date, 1867, and the occurrence: below, in a frame, is the letter sent by Her Royal Highness's Equerry. We never let this room under"—he waited, studied the traveller, and resumed—"under seven shillings per day."

Harlowe secured the lodging, opened the window,

and sat watching till past midnight, for the carriages returning from the ball. He wondered whether Jennie had really attended it; she did not care for dancing. Several vehicles rattled by: the curate's wife's hired landau came first; then the brougham and pair of Dr Rench; the dog-cart of the poor man's physician, Dr Mayler; the Colonel's omnibus for a party; Mrs Tredegar's barouche lent to Mrs Gillespie: Jennie might have been in any one of these conveyances. At last he went to bed, where, on a mattress of evil-smelling feathers, he tossed and turned, disappointed for some reason, sleepless and irritable. The parish church clock had chimed one when Federan drove his gig at full speed into the town. John leapt out of bed in time to see it pass. Clouds were now floating, like immense black butterflies, moths, lizards and archaic birds, across the sky; it was impossible to discern the features of Federan or his companion. But Harlowe recognised them with a pinch of envy as the lovers, and when he fell asleep much later he dreamt that he was pursuing the pair over a deep clear sea full of elm-trees. And a bird, under the sea, sang a song about the Princess of Wales's horse till the barman said, "The Miss Leddles are in bed at this time, unless they are sitting up for Miss Sussex." "Miss Sussex!" screamed the bird, turning into a goose: "she doesn't dance, she doesn't dance; didn't you know that? You're a fool, a fool, a fool!"

Harlowe woke at six in the morning with these words in his ears, and the feather bed risen on each side of him as though he were lying between two towering bolsters. Where was his blissful mood of the night before? Nothing had happened to change him, and yet—

“Well,” he said to himself, “one can’t expect to keep up at that pitch. No one ever goes twice on the same stream—different waters are constantly flowing down.”

Jennie was sitting in the porch half asleep that noon when she heard Harlowe’s voice calling her name. She followed the direction of the sound, and saw him standing looking over the hedge straight at her. She was not surprised, but, obeying a disquieting impulse, she assumed an air of great astonishment, of which she was immediately ashamed, although she made no attempt to modify it.

“Oh . . . Johnnie! You . . . John! I had your letter yesterday. It has been a long, long time coming. It must have been delayed in the post. How are you? How brown you are—and thinner! But you are the same John—just the same.”

As she spoke she went down the path to meet him, and she laughed hysterically at the end of each short phrase. He blushed, forgot the things he had intended to say, and held his hands out toward her over the gate. She laughed again.

"How like you! Why don't you lift up the latch and come in?"

She remembered the day he went away, his stupid conversation and her bitter tears; her laugh grew a little cruel and more gay.

"So these are your lodgings?" exclaimed Harlowe. "I couldn't help being pleased when your mother wrote me that you were at a village twelve miles from a railway station. It sounded lonely; but I've been lonely too, although I can't believe now that I have been away. When you are there I can forget everything disagreeable."

His fond glance, which confessed far more than he supposed, fell like a burning shadow on her face, and she turned away impatiently, asking herself why he was so much more ardent so much too late. But she was easier to love than she had been before her own passion for Federan. Her eyes, her features, her whole person, her very movements and gestures had lost the illusiveness of immaturity; she seemed a woman now, seductive, emotional, very young, altogether human. Harlowe thought that he himself had changed, or that he had forgotten her extreme fascination.

"I am going to scold you," said Jennie. "Why didn't you write oftener? I couldn't understand it, and I don't think I shall ever understand it."

"It was the climate. I didn't want you to know that I was ill. That is all over, past and done with.

But I could never have done a thing without you. You were my last thought at night and my first in the morning. You have been such a help and a hope."

"Don't talk about hope—I never do."

"Why not?"

"I don't know exactly; but . . . if you had only written, John! Somehow I thought you had forgotten me. Life seemed so dreary."

He was pleased at this display of feeling, and once more betrayed, in an artless glance, his entire devotion to her.

"I never dared to hope that you cared so much as all that. It was only to spare you any anxiety. If I didn't write, it wasn't because I didn't send you messages by every cloud, and every wave, and every leaf! Didn't you feel my constant thoughts in the air around you?" He blushed at his own sentimentality. "I didn't know," he added naïvely, "that I could say anything so nice as that!"

"Neither did I!" said Jennie, smiling.

"And how pretty you are!" he went on, gaining courage: "you were always a pretty girl, but the country air has given you rosy cheeks."

She winced at the expression, because she wished to be pale.

"May I stay here a little while?" he asked.

"We can walk in the meadows."

She told him about her experience at the school,

and her new plans with regard to Rachel Tredegar. "The Tredegars," she explained, "are clients of Mr Federan."

"Who is he?"

"Miss Leddle's nephew."

The conversation dropped. Harlowe could think of nothing to say, although he had always supposed that they would talk for hours when they first met after their long separation. His heart grew heavy, and a dreadful sadness came over his spirits. He could not formulate his misery, but he felt that he had lost his place in her life. He wished he had never come back; he had been happier by himself, feeding on empty hopes, looking forward to the realisation of vain day-dreams.

"I was happy out there," he said suddenly. "I didn't know it at the time, but I was."

"Perhaps you'll go back," she suggested, not meaning to wound him.

"I may," he said; "I have seen you and that is all I wanted. You know I don't go in for compliments—it seems odd always when I make one."

"You're bolder in that respect than you used to be."

"They are nothing new so far as my thoughts go, but one gets into the habit of supposing that it's rather an ass who says pretty things to women. The fact is, I feel somehow that there is a sort of cloud

between us—it is a sort of veil, not much perhaps—”

“Yes, John ; I know !”

She stood still ; she laughed no more ; she was serious, tearful, almost beseeching. Harlowe was now agitated, and the hardest elements in his nature—the elements she knew nothing of—were roused.

“That cloud used not to be. We were more than friends—we were great friends.”

“Yes,” said Jennie, “if men and women ever are real friends. But are they ?”

“You have hit the difficulty exactly ! There is a danger of my becoming insincere. There is insincerity even in silence. I want to ask you straight out—did you want me to come back when I was away ?”

“Yes, yes. I wanted you to come back. I thought I should be so glad to see you. . . . I was glad, I am glad—”

“But not in the way I mean ? Why mince matters ? You know what I feel toward you, and perhaps you know what I have been hoping all these months. It could not have been much of a secret. Don’t mind about hurting my feelings ; let us only be truthful. I have got a suspicion that someone has come between us.” He grew livid as he spoke, and a strange thought seemed to wake in his eyes, which pierced her with entreaties and a bitter discernment.

"It began by your not writing," said Jennie; "and it is true—there is somebody else. I didn't think it would ever happen, but it has happened. I was not bound to you in any way."

He laughed this time.

"You were free—perfectly free. Never reproach yourself."

"All the same, I've tried not to like him—I avoided him," she continued. "The thing seemed impossible. Now, I cannot keep it from you—we are engaged. He knows how poor I am—he loves me just for myself. But I am not at all happy—not so happy as you think."

"Who is?" said Harlowe; "who is?"

"I have a knife in my heart all the time," she went on. "I shall always need you."

"Don't ask me to look on! I'm not a faithful Dobbin who sits about for years and praises the other fellow. I can't do that—I hate the man. I should hate him just the same if he were an angel from heaven. He has got you—he has cut me out. Think what you please of me, Jennie—that is *me*, at any rate. I cannot love my enemies."

"He isn't your enemy."

"He has cut me out, hasn't he? What worse could he do me? I can keep an open mind about him, and if you care about him it ought to be enough."

"That sounds poor fun,"

"Most things are poor fun—judged as fun. Are you quite sure you know your man?"

"Indeed, I do know him," she said proudly; yet she sighed.

"I am not talking of him; I mean myself," replied Harlowe. "I don't understand this nonsense about being happy because you are. I couldn't hang around watching you live your life with some other man. It is not in me, and I cannot do it. If you marry him, I'll go away—clear out root and branch, and although I shall want to see you again every day and hour all my life, I sha'n't see you. It will be because I can't. I would sooner cut my throat. Now do you understand?"

If he had shown all this spirit a year sooner, she thought, the whole story might have been different.

"Be patient," she pleaded; "don't let us part in anger. You haven't heard everything."

She was wondering why he had not asked, at least, his rival's name. But Harlowe's anger had passed beyond his control, and, without another word, he left her because he feared his own tongue. She watched him staggering and stumbling like a blind man across the meadows to the road.

"I'm sorry," she said; "I'm sorry."

He could not hear her: he could hear only the bird in his wild dream—"You're a fool! a fool!" He stared about him for some refuge—some place

where he could hide his chagrin and yield to his anguish.

"I want to wake up," he said to himself. "I must wake up. None of this is true."

But he knew he was lying. He was already awake, and it was all true.

CHAPTER X

“The carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, ‘*It is ready* for the soldering.’”

ISAIAH xli. 7.

THE original structure of Franton Manor had been a farm, but in 1875 it was purchased by a wealthy spinster, who, having succumbed to the agreeable courtesies of an impecunious local architect, provided him with work by having the building, which was purely Jacobean, pulled down and a sham Palladian mansion erected in its stead. The architect married the young cousin of his benefactress—a step which showed his entire misconstruction of that lady’s views, and when she died of syncope, thirty years later, it was found that all her property had been bequeathed, without condition, to her god-daughter, Rachel Tredegar. At first the girl had been pleased by this romantic stroke of fortune: as an heiress her situation seemed exalted above mean ideas. She had a languid body but an exuberant imagination, which, instead of expressing itself through the medium of some art, wove visions of such overpowering force that they were more enervating, and certainly more insidious, than the realities of life. Before she had

reached her twenty-sixth year, she had passed through so many histories, suffered so many emotional crises of the fancy, she had thought so much, felt so much, thrilled so much, and lived so long in the world of her own creation, that she was like a feeble flame in a closed cupboard. The faintest breath of fresh air from the open will put it out. Women twice her age, who had met life face to face from day to day, were not so satiated, bitter, fatigued and irritable as this girl who had never known an hour of real pain, of actual grief, or genuine pleasure. Having alienated, by her egoism, the few friends who were connected with her family, she lived alone with her mother at Franton Manor, where she indulged to the full her passion for solitude and her curious extravagance in dress. It was her favourite amusement to pretend that she was two persons—the chivalrous lover and the capricious mistress—and she would maintain long silent dialogues and adventures for weeks at a stretch between herself and some hero from a novel by Paul Bourget, or Flaubert, or the younger Dumas, or de Maupassant. In other moods she would become the exquisite amorous pair from one of Henry Harland's romances, or Rosalind and Orlando, or Manon Lescaut and des Grieux, or Charlotte and young Werner. Mrs Tredegar had no clue to these vagaries of a mind which was exotic rather than unbalanced, and it was thought in the neighbourhood that she feared for Rachel's sanity. She refused to

see visitors, returned no calls, and dwelt, accessible only to the doctors and the lawyers, in proud despair, watching her daughter's apparent somnambulism, and estimating, by guesswork, the dressmaker's bills which she was never permitted to see. One day the unhappy lady lost her self-command, and, bursting into distressing cries, flung herself, terrified, into the arms of Dr Rench.

"My daughter is mad!" she said. "One of these nights she will kill herself and me. I am really frightened. She mutters to herself; she eats alone; she wanders about at all hours in the grounds; if she sees anyone—even a gardener—she hides. They have orders to keep out of her sight. She won't go to bed till three in the morning; she never gets up till the afternoon. Sometimes she lives on biscuits and wine—nothing else; then it will be fruit only; then milk only; then meat—quantities of meat. She leads a living death. You cannot keep the truth from me—she is mad."

"She is hysterical," said Dr Rench. "You must make her see people."

After that Mrs Tredegar found a certain relief in saying to Rachel whenever a scene came—the odious, inevitable scene, with harsh recriminations, with senseless reproaches, and finally tears—"You are mad!"

Long seasons would pass during which the mother and daughter lived wholly separate, never speaking or meeting. At brighter times, when Rachel aban-

doned fiction and poetry for religious works or biographies of the holy, they would take drives together and play cards together in the evening. But intercourse of the kind was exceptional, and by degrees it became a strain to each of them. In a comedy everyone must have some intention at least of acting: Rachel was the one comedian in these farces at Franton Manor; to her mother every word was always serious, always momentous, and it soon became tiresome to play the parts of Buddha or Ignatius Loyola to a woman who thought the former was a wooden idol in the East, and the latter one of the old masters.

Jennie had been in this strange household for a week when Mrs Gillespie met Miss Leddle at the grocer's in the High Street.

"I hear," said the vicar's wife, "that Miss Sussex has had a wonderful influence on poor Rachel. They tell me she gets up for breakfast, walks about the garden, dresses for dinner, is kind to her mother, and altogether changed!"

"And she has been able to see Gerald," said Miss Leddle, not to be outdone in news: "he has been to Franton three times this week. He tells me she shows quite a head, and takes the greatest interest in business affairs."

"How wrong it is then to give way to feelings of despair!" exclaimed Mrs Gillespie. "The afflicted girl may yet recover."

"I believe she has never had anything the matter. My nephew says she is the cleverest woman he ever met," said Miss Leddle.

This information produced such an effect upon Mrs Gillespie that, when she seated herself in her basket-phaeton, she turned the pony's head toward Franton Manor. She had no hope of being received by Mrs Tredegar, but it always soothed her curiosity to drive up to the entrance, survey the outside of the house, and study the butler's face when he came in reply to her summons. Drover, the butler, was famous for his prudence, but from long habits of unnatural and stifling reticence, he had so trained his features that they conveyed, when he chose, his inmost feelings. Mrs Gillespie, who gave his wife her old clothes, had become an adept in translating Drover's twitches, blinkings and lip-play into language of the nicest precision. The old man on this occasion came to the front door with his brows arched in astonishment, and a smile which showed all his discoloured teeth; he informed Mrs Gillespie that all the ladies were at home. He waved her groom toward the stable, and led the visitor across the hall into the library—a handsome room which Mrs Tredegar used as her boudoir. The ladies kissed each other, and while Mrs Gillespie was wondering how she could account for her visit, Mrs Tredegar made a signal to Drover to bring up some tea.

"To tell the truth I came in on the spur of the

moment. I heard indirectly that Rachel was much better. I hope you both like Miss Sussex?"

"So far," said Mrs Tredegar, in a grudging manner, "the experiment has been a success. You know the vulgar proverb about new brooms! But I always feel that in everything that relates to Rachel's happiness—she's the most capricious of all mortals—"

She did not finish the sentence, for Rachel herself, in a yellow velvet tea-gown, glided into their presence. Her face was more heavily rouged than usual, and her hair was arranged in *Récamier* curls on her forehead. As she caught sight of Mrs Gillespie she started with admirably-assumed surprise, threw back the curls from her face as actresses do when they wish to suggest illness or fatigue, and sank back, with a wan smile, on to her couch, which was covered with a magnificent Indian shawl.

"How nice it is to see you!" she murmured graciously; and choosing a rose from a vase by her side, she inhaled its perfume as she closed her eyes.

"Are you quite sure that you are well enough to see Mr Federan to-day?" said her mother.

"Of course I shall see him. I am determined to take a proper interest in my own affairs."

"You are quite right, dearest; but all the same, is your head equal to it? I think he tires you."

"My head is much better than people suppose," said the girl. "It must indeed be strong

to bear this impossible domestic *fracas* which only takes place when anything worth doing is even contemplated! One is supposed to have energy and to spare for the coachman's accounts and misdoings, for discussion about the cook's character, and the choice of wall-paper for the pantry; but plans for the future, or questions which affect my entire life, are thought beyond me. I have a good mind to get rid of this place and travel. I am getting very sick of it. The East calls me—I want to go to Benares. The Hindoos have a religion: I want to see someone with a religion he believes." She opened her languid eyes. "Forgive me, dear Mrs Gillespie. What would the vicar think? I am always saying the wrong thing."

"Let me see Mr Federan first, and hear what he has to propose," said her mother, impatiently.

"No. I am not a child. You try to make me out an imbecile. I don't appeal to you, Mrs. Gillespie," she added, "because it would be unfair to drag you into the discussion."

She threw a cold glance at her mother's flushing face, and sank back once more on the many embroidered cushions which supported her back. The visitor, whose emotions were divided between the discomfort of feeling unwelcome and the interest of hearing a quarrel, was about to take her leave when Jennie entered the room. Mrs Gillespie had never before realised the girl's beauty.

"Good heavens!" she thought: "how fortunate there's no son or husband in the house!"

Then she rose, kissed Jennie kindly, and took her leave. In crossing the hall she observed a dark young man standing with his hands crossed behind him, looking with forced interest at some family portraits. She asked Drover who this stranger was, but the butler himself did not know. Giddy from hearing and seeing so much that was inexplicable and extraordinary, the vicar's wife drove home, nor did she feel easy in her spirit till she had confided her belief to the vicar that everyone at the Manor had madness in some form. "Money never comes without its curse," she added.

When Mrs Gillespie had gone, Jennie went up to Mrs Tredegar. "I really came in to ask you if I might show the garden to a very old friend, Mr Harlowe, who has come over to see me especially."

"This is the pleasantest room in the house," said Rachel, before her mother could reply: "ask your friend in here. I'm going upstairs."

"I will see Drover and tell him," sighed Mrs Tredegar; and she stepped out through the long window which was open on to the lawn.

Rachel stood up; her eyes darkened, her brow showed heavy lines, and her face, which had a picturesque quality, became peevish, undistinguished and almost vulgar.

"My mother wears me out," she said. "I was

feeling a shade better. I must rest again before Mr Federan comes."

She left the room, and Jennie paced the floor nervously till Drover announced Harlowe. His countenance would have seemed hard and even menacing but for the soft expression which rose to his eyes the moment they met Jennie's.

"I am glad you have come," she said. "You haven't enjoyed your holiday. You might have spent it much better elsewhere."

"I have seen you, and that is all I wanted. Are you happy here?"

"They are both very kind to me."

"Why shouldn't they be kind?" he asked angrily. "They ought to worship you." He reddened. "I haven't behaved well all this week. I have been sulking. I ought to have gone away, but I couldn't. And I have decided to put myself out of court, and I will just ask the questions that a relation would ask. I suppose," he added bitterly, "you look upon me in that light—as a sort of half-relation? This engagement—who is the man?"

"Gerald Federan. But, dear John, the engagement is a close secret. No one must know about it."

"Why?"

"Because old Mr Federan is ill."

"Not a good reason," he said, with a gesture of impatience. Jennie pretended to smile, but her voice was unsteady as she answered: "It is the best reason

I can give." Then, after a short silence, during which she looked away, she leant forward, touched his arm, and said, with entreaty: "Be kind about it. You don't know how nervous I am! The other day I was stunned, stupefied by happiness; I wondered why I didn't think. But I have been thinking since."

He did not reply: he did not move.

"Don't begrudge me that one happy day!" she said.

"Your happiness," he said harshly, "is as strange as my misery. I was stunned, too. I wondered why your news hurt so little; but the first pang grew and grew by degrees until it became a real agony—suffocating, unendurable. It caught my heart and caught my throat—as though two iron hands gripped me. I have never loved anyone except you. I may be weak to let you know how much you are to me. But neither one's strength nor one's work nor one's despair avail: the poorest creature in his love may be luckier than the conqueror of the world! Generosity is not in my line, and you mustn't expect it. I will do this man Federan bare justice. I wouldn't injure him, but I am not going to make it easy for him. And I'm not going to pretend to like him."

"Have you met him?"

"Yes; I picked him out in a crowd."

"That wouldn't be difficult," she said proudly: "he's very handsome."

"Beyond question."

"But what is the use of this bitterness?" she exclaimed. "What have I done to you, after all? Surely I may love whom I please?"

"Haven't I said so?"

"Then why dwell on the painful things which neither of us can help? It's unfair."

"Give me a little time. One can get used to anything. But I'm unsettled; I have been living in a fool's paradise, and the awakening is never pleasant. My love for you kept me isolated, I suppose, from the rest of the world. I had one of my own, I thought."

"Then can't you understand *me*, John? I'm the same; everybody in love is the same."

"You make me laugh!" he exclaimed; "you are like all romantic women—you have no sense of humour. Let us both be nice to each other—because you love Federan as well as I love you! But I'll say no more on the subject. I'm not such a brute as I sound. I will ask a few questions I ought to ask because I have been an old friend. Did you tell me that Federan was Miss Tredegar's lawyer?"

"Yes. But she finds the estate too dull; they want to get rid of it. Mr Federan is trying to arrange the sale. He may buy it himself."

"I can understand their wanting to get rid of it, but why should Federan wish to buy it—a bad investment? It won't pay him 2 per cent.—even if he lets the place."

"He is very clever. He wouldn't make a mistake. He must have some idea."

"Do you know what that idea is?"

"No; I will ask him."

"Yes . . . I should ask him—if I were in your place."

These rapid words were hurled to and fro as though they were jugglers' knives; they were not meant to wound, but the risk seemed great, nevertheless.

"You talk in a doubting way," said Jennie, hotly. "I don't like that tone."

"I can't help feeling interested on your account. Why should Federan make a foolish investment? Besides, is he a capitalist?"

"The money belongs to a syndicate."

"The more need for caution. He mustn't spend the syndicate's money in a reckless way. I know the grab, bluster and bluff of modern business. It means getting as much as you can for as little as you can give. I prefer to earn a straight fee for straight work. That is the only way for a white man to live."

"You have hurt me all the same. I know you are a true friend, but I can't allow you to doubt Gerald—that would be disloyalty to him."

"Well," said Harlowe, standing up, "your unreasonableness takes me more than all your good sense! What do you know about business?"

"Nothing. All I know is that women are sacrificed for it daily. None of us are beautiful enough to hold our own against it. I begin to fear that to love a woman is a career in itself." (Here she quoted Helmyng). "Lovers in poetry and novels are usually idle; one is seldom told a word about their working hours; they are nearly always rich enough to go round the world, either to follow some woman or to forget her. In actual life the average man can forget her as a matter of course by merely attending to the demands of his profession."

"My girl," said Harlowe, "if you were quite satisfied you wouldn't talk that way."

She coloured and smiled for the first time during their conversation.

"Gerald," she said, "detests business."

The subtlety of this remark puzzled him for a few seconds, but he understood her at last.

"You mean, you are his career."

"That's what I meant."

Harlowe, struck by her beauty and her arrogance—the excusable arrogance of youth and love—sighed.

"He's no exception. You are the exception; you are a beautiful woman, and he has taught you your power. It is, and it will remain, a great power—until he owns you."

He winced at the thought, and his jealousy stung him just as a sudden acute stab of pain will penetrate and intensify a steady ache.

"I must go," he said : "my tongue will run away with me. May I come down again?"

"Not to quarrel?"

"No, honey, not to quarrel. . . ."

He was fond of the coon songs which were sung in musical comedies at the Gaiety Theatre, and "Honey" had always seemed to him a name for Jennie.

"Good-bye, honey dear," he said, taking her hand and looking earnestly into her face : "when I get alone I blame myself for it all. As I told you, I've been living in dreams, and I thought they were real, because you were real. It didn't follow, you see."

He shrugged his shoulders, looked her up and down, tightened his lips, and made all his features rigid.

"You are good by accident," he continued : "there's the unaccountably evil gipsy the whole time. I've always seen it."

"Gipsy women are faithful."

"Yes, to handsome men. Good-bye!"

When Rachel returned, twenty minutes later, she found Jennie sitting at the writing-table. Her plain gown of blue voile, without trimming or a single jewel, showed the lines of her graceful figure, which still had the indecision of immaturity; her arms and hips were perhaps too slight, and her hair, dressed high that day, showed a neck as white and delicate as a child's.

"You look about fifteen!" said Rachel: "you're young, I know, but you seem innocent as well. Have you ever been in love?"

"Yes."

Rachel's eyes, which were full of a curious knowledge, grew brighter.

"Then how does one know when one really cares?"

"There is no rule," said the other, laughing.

"What is it to be really in love?" insisted Rachel. "Perhaps I'm incapable of it. I have a horror, too, of actualities: real flesh and blood can be so repulsive." She shivered. "Still, I see sometimes approximations to the ideal. So tell me—what is it to be in love?"

"To find someone who is . . . all you live for . . . everything, everything you have in the world!" said Jennie.

"Then was all you live for, and all that, the man who called here and left just a little while ago?"

"No," said Jennie, after some hesitation.

Rachel lost her languid manner, sat bolt upright, and exclaimed, "What! Have you been engaged all this time to someone? I will know! You must tell me!"

"Do you think you ought to ask?"

"Why not?"

"Please don't—as a favour."

"I will—I will—I will!" said Rachel, vehemently. "I am beginning to be amused by human beings.

I'll guess. Is it a man down here? All the vicars are married; the curate with asthma is too ill, the curate who is muscular is too plain, and the curate with the tolerable figure is too poor—although it is always the poorest and the plainest men who don't seem afraid to propose."

"Why shouldn't it be some man in London?" said Jennie.

Rachel had suddenly grown sombre: she looked at Jennie with almost malignant envy, mixed with a certain remorse for her own lost purity of soul. Where had she not dragged it? No wonder she felt old, haggard and weary.

"It cannot be," she murmured, "and yet it's likely; it is—it is . . . I see by your face it is . . . it is Gerald Federan. You cannot deny it. It is—is it?"

In her agitation she turned over the silver vase of roses; but Jennie, who had moved to the window, did not notice this. She had determined not to betray her engagement, for she had promised Federan, against her will, to say nothing.

"If I answer one question it would mean answering all," she replied, "and you don't know yet how firm I can be when it is necessary."

Rachel bit her lip.

"My dear," she said lightly, "you have no sense of humour."

"Mr Harlowe told me the same thing half an hour ago."

"Perhaps you don't need it. Humour is the refuge of the disappointed wise: the disappointed unwise take to religion. For the present you won't miss either—you're a very lovely person. Of course, you couldn't consider Mr Federan. I was teasing you. Didn't you know that? You could make a brilliant marriage. But when Mr Federan comes, I want you to go out of the room. It is awkward for him to talk business before a third person, and I am not precisely a child! I shouldn't mind your being here, but mamma would be jealous."

"I would much prefer not to be present. It is awkward for me too."

"If I should want you I will call you, or send for you."

She watched Jennie leave the room; then she sprang with agility from her seat and went to the mirror. Her face contracted with real nausea of dissatisfaction. She admired her own undeniable elegance, because her ruling passion was self-love: the rouge on her cheeks, her pale, scarcely visible eyebrows, her full-curved painted mouth and tinted hair, pleased her taste for the *baroque*; but the consciousness that all these effects were produced mainly by artifice was humiliating.

"And the fatigue of it all!" she muttered: "why can't I look this way without so much trouble? I am tired out before I can see anybody!"

Then she flung herself on the sofa and tried to sleep.

CHAPTER XI

“Si tu gardes ta foi, qu’importe qu’elle mente !
La beauté de l’amant n’est qu’au cœur de l’amante,
Et l’univers entier n’est qu’une vision.”

ANATOLE FRANCE.

FEDERAN, after the night of the ball, passed through every degree of exultation and despair. But he threw himself feverishly into Coolidge’s schemes, because they offered the one solution to his pressing need of money. How could he marry without money? And if he married, he wished to marry at once, while his love was sweet and fierce. It was horrible, however, to feel obliged to cheat one woman in order to gain another. His interviews with Rachel Tredegar were painful; her attitudes, her soft voice, her glances, the subtle corruption of her whole personality, fascinated while they disturbed him; they seemed to his provincial mind the manners of a *grande dame*, and although he was fully conscious that they did not please the best in his nature, he began to wish that Jennie had a note of the same kind, and he said to himself, “These things keep a man; one’s best is the least part of one—that is only human.”

On his side, he appealed to Rachel's real, if vitiated, sense of beauty. She felt that she could gaze at him for hours, just as she might gaze at some noble statue. Here she deceived herself; it was not her habit to gaze for hours at the inanimate under any form.

This, then, was his mood and hers when the time came for their fourth interview. He was ashamed of his schemes; she wished to find excuses for meeting him frequently. She was annoyed to see him accompanied by Coolidge when he was ushered into the library at the appointed hour.

"This is Mr Coolidge, whom I mentioned in my last letter. He will speak for his client," said Gerald.

She bowed coldly, and said, "Mr Federan has told you that I wish to sell this property. I know that few people would care for it."

"Still," said Gerald, watching the rhythmic action of her long white hands, as they caressed and smoothed the folds of her velvet gown—"still, a purchaser might be found. From one point of view, you are bound to make a bad bargain."

"A certain sum of money that I want, and which will amuse me, is better than a place which nobody wants, and which bores me to death!" she replied.

"Just so," said Coolidge, speaking for the first time. "I am in a position now to speak on behalf of a client who feels disposed to make an offer. He

knows it is most inadequate from one point of view, but it relieves you from the burden. I feel some reluctance in mentioning the figure."

"No! no! let me hear," said Rachel.

"Well, roughly, the whole estate for—say ten thousand pounds."

She turned, without altering her expression, toward Federan: he could not tell whether she thought the offer absurd, or worth discussion.

"What would you expect if you were in my place?" she asked.

"I could only advise you to consider it," he said uneasily.

"I don't wish to consider anything. I want to be guided by you."

"If you want to travel, get rid of an expensive house, all the men's wages and the up-keep of a country seat, this is an opportunity. But, financially, it's a compromise."

He did not conceal his repugnance for the subject: it was hateful—a degradation.

"Who is the client?" asked Rachel, saying inwardly, "Look at me. Look at me!"

Federan obeyed the unuttered command, and her eyes, with their almost forbidden intelligence, dilated, melted and languished as they encountered his, which seemed to implore her pardon.

"My client is a London man, in the City," said Coolidge, apparently blind to this curious by-play.

"I think I may as well accept his offer," said Rachel. "In fact, I know I will."

"I don't like to hurry you. Take twenty-four hours," said Gerald.

"I want it settled at once," she said firmly. "I never need more time for dull things."

She was impatient for Coolidge's departure: his drawl, his caution, his sly stare, affected her nerves.

"Mrs Tredegar might oppose the idea," said Gerald.

"She opposes everything," replied Rachel, contemptuously.

"You ought to tell her the proposal. I should feel more at ease," he insisted.

"Then to satisfy you—for no other reason—I'll go now and tell her."

She rose from the sofa, and leaning gracefully on each chair and table she passed, as though each step was an effort, she reached the door, which Federan opened.

"It won't be necessary for me to remain, Miss Tredegar," said Coolidge. "Federan will communicate your decision to me."

She agreed, inclined her head, and went out.

"This can't go on!" exclaimed Federan; "I swear it can't. She must be told the facts."

Coolidge with reproachful gravity asked, "What are the facts?"

"The coal idea," said Federan.

"An idea is not a fact," said Coolidge, sadly. "You forget that this is a speculation — indeed, a gamble. Miss Tredegar has at least the guaranteed ten thousand—we have the possibility of finding coal. She must gain in any event, whereas we stand to lose. But, since I have seen her, the best notion of all has come into my head."

"What was that?"

"I can't think why it never occurred to me before—it is self-evident. She's a pretty woman, and she likes you. And how are your own feelings getting on all this time? Perhaps you haven't asked yourself that question."

"You are talking pure madness," said Federan—"pure madness."

"You are more interested than you imagine in that strange, melancholy girl; but God forbid that I should urge you, or any man, to marry! As a third person looking on, I could not help noticing Miss Tredegar's manner. You have a strong chance, and if I were worldly I'd call you a fool to miss it. However, as I have to catch that London train, I must go."

He wrung Federan's hand affectionately, gave him a long, eloquent look, and went on,—

"Don't I loathe it all as much as you do? What's the use of depressing each other? All business is rotten; the old noble way of robbing one's neighbour-Baron, and stealing his land by brute force, was

straightforward at anyrate. But if you abandon this deal, you won't soon find another so clean—taken all round. I'm right, believe me. Aristotle kept a druggist's shop in Athens, and Plato sold oil at a profit in Egypt! If I owned a good oil, I, too, could be an idealist."

With these words he turned on his heel, and, sighing, left Federan to his own reflections.

The young man, cut off from the immediate physical influences—always too strongly felt by him—of Rachel and Coolidge, was able to distinguish between the forces at work in his soul. He cared nothing about Rachel; he still kept his blind fondness for Coolidge; he loved Jennie with all the love he could give, and it seemed that, once married to her, once the Franton mines disposed of, he could lead an honourable life in a hunting county as a man of moderate but independent means. He saw it all: a little house, with just the beginnings of a stock-farm, in Leicestershire; he saw the stables—the fine hunters, worth any money, and bought as he knew, infallibly, how to buy them; the old-fashioned garden with herbaceous borders for Jennie; the nursery for two pretty children—a dark boy, and a fair girl, with blue eyes and waving hair to her waist; the summer evenings they would spend under trees drinking coffee; the merry winters, the sporting autumns, the spring journeys to London and Paris just to keep in touch with the outside world! There was a life a

man might live and enjoy—once sure of the right woman and the fixed income. It could be done if one understood horses, on two thousand a year pleasantly, given love and great beauty in the household. Could one have everything? Was not one willing to practise a certain amount of self-denial for the sake of a girl one adored? What a charming picture, and so possible! For why, in God's name, should it be impossible? What a fool he would be to sing,—

“Ah! fuyez! douce image à mon âme trop chère!”

“So you admire Chaplin's work?” said Rachel's voice at his elbow; “but that engraving does the original no justice.”

During his soliloquy he had strolled in front of a reproduction of Charles Chaplin's morbid study known as “Souvenirs,” in the Luxembourg Museum. The blonde woman, with dishevelled hair, half-open mouth, flushed cheeks, and drowsy eyes, offended Federan's inherited prejudices; it seemed to him that a man would have to be very young or rather gross to have such a picture in his house.

“I suppose it is well painted,” he said awkwardly.

“My father knew the artist,” said Rachel, inventing an adroit lie. “I see we are alike, Mr Federan; we both suffer from the curse of fastidiousness, and cannot accept the conventional squalor. But you are

a man : you can search, if you choose, for your ideal. I am a woman, and I must either starve because I cannot feed on husks, or eat the husks till I perish of disgust. I prefer to starve—in any event. I cannot escape ‘the infinite which is in us’—or my horror of the cruelty, the hideousness of life. In the Middle Ages, souls like mine—the over-civilised in every generation—found refuge in nunneries. But what is left for us in this century of doubt and luxury ? You see, I like the luxuries !”

She had brought a faint odour of verbena into the atmosphere, and Federan once more had to admit that she possessed peculiar magnetic attractions : she wore an air of the *amoureuse* in French comedy, and she moved like Madame Bartet—that is to say, her gowns always seemed transparent, although they were not.

“I will talk freely to you,” she continued, “although we were utter strangers to each other a week ago. But there are friendships of an hour and antipathies of a day : don’t you agree ? Mamma refuses to advise me—hers is the unkindness of a lifetime. She may be right. Can’t I take my risk of regrets as well as another ? I have quite decided to sell the place ; it has grown hateful to me.”

Then, sitting next to him, with her eyes fixed softly on his, she told him of her pitiful childhood spent alone, always alone, without brothers or play-

mates or sisters. Her father, a man of æsthetic tastes, had spent many months of each year in Italy and France ; there, at hotels, she had learnt French and Italian by talking to the chambermaids and valets. What a life for a little girl ! She described her melancholy, her gradual disenchantment, the painless, mysterious sickness of soul and body which had made them all fear, when she was seventeen, that she would die. Was it a decline ? No, but a weariness, a *malaise*, an inexplicable discontent. And so she had never known the delight of companionship ; she had lost, through disuse, the gift of making friends—she had none ; she was solitary, therefore, and “ desiring what she had not, the beautiful.” She tried not to see what others saw, since she could not feel as others felt.

Federan, bewildered and flattered by these confidences, stammered out, “ Many girls are like that.”

“ But,” she said, “ I have only been unhappy lately. I had yielded to what I took for the irreparable. I stood in the world as though I were a little stone statue in some neglected corner of a garden.” She watched, she said, the flowers, the trees, the insects buzzing and flitting, the birds, the butterflies, the showers, the long twilights, the dawns, the sunsets. She saw nothing too close—it was all dim, distant, intangible : without knowing it she had been happy in her sombre pleasures of watching and dreaming.

"I am afraid," said Federan, "all this business has worried you."

She hesitated. "Perhaps it has called me to life. You, at least, have always been welcome."

The oppressive stillness of the house, which was disturbed only by the hoarse croaking of the frogs in the stone pond, was suddenly broken ; and Jennie, at the piano in the drawing-room, was heard singing Sophie's song from Massenet's *Werther* :

Du gai soleil, plein de flamme,
Dans l'azur resplendissant,
La pure clarté descend
De nos fronts jusqu'à notre âme,
Et l'oiseau qui monte aux cieux
Dans la brise qui soupire,
Est revenu pour nous dire
Que Dieu permet d'être heureux !

Neither Federan nor Rachel spoke till she had finished.

"Yes ; God permits happiness," said Rachel : "if we are blind enough to give our terrified joys—such as they are—that name ! But with such a voice, an ugly woman could charm one into any belief—till she stopped. Of course you admire Miss Sussex ?"

"Who would not admire her ?" he answered, dismissing the question as lightly as he could.

But Rachel persisted : "I remember your saying the other day, when we were walking by the tulips,

that you had never thought of marriage till quite recently. Did you think of marrying Jennie?"

She spoke feebly and slowly, with trembling lips, which seemed to kiss and implore the empty air.

"It is true that I never thought seriously of marriage till the other day," he replied; "but thoughts may mean little, and I am seldom sure of myself. One seems drawn, pushed, or dragged through life by unseen forces. That is why I want you to take time over the present question. May I put the whole matter in writing for you?"

"Yes: write. I can't tell you how grateful I feel!" she faltered; "you are so good to me."

Then, stepping nearer to him, she glanced away to the fountain which was playing over the noisy frogs in the stone pond on the lawn. Something in her drooping, averted head, her sigh, her embarrassment, her touch, and the scent of verbena in her hair, stirred his gallantry as much as his pity. She felt a kiss pressed softly on her hand.

"Why did you do that?" she asked, not at once, but after a moment's hesitation.

"An irresistible impulse, I suppose. Are you angry?"

She showed an astonishment at the question which she had not displayed for the caress. "It is the custom abroad," she observed: "how could I be angry?" Smiling she offered him her other hand, inviting a repetition of the formality. This self-

possession piqued him, and he began to fear that he had made too much of a trifle. He kissed her left and caught her right again.

"Three times is not the custom," she said. But they both laughed, and when he drove away he saw her standing on the lawn by the fountain. The frogs, who were used to her presence, kept up their croaking, and as she remained there, immovable and frail, in her diaphanous draperies, she seemed like some enchanted captive in a legend, half a tree, half a woman, and wholly dolorous.

"These people," he thought, "who have the misfortune to be born above the common anxieties of bread-winning, make the more importance of the few things they are able to grieve over. It seems we all must take our share of misery."

A reflection so philosophic could not but appease the least contented mind: Federan smiled to himself all the way home, and had droll ideas about the polygamous tendencies of the natural man.

CHAPTER XII

“But God said,
‘I will have a purer gift :
There is smoke in the flame.’”

EMERSON.

THE following day, which was Sunday, Miss Leddle celebrated the anniversary of her birth. She had prepared an early dinner of ox-tail soup, fried soles, sweetbreads, roast lamb, ducklings, chicken and ham pie, fruit tarts with cream, jellies, tipsy-cake, blanchmanges, and a fine dessert: she exhibited port, sherry, claret, cider and lemonade on the sideboard. The wine in her cellar was excellent, because it had all been selected by old Mr Leddle, and she did not trust herself to buy a fresh supply.

“This,” she would say, “will last my lifetime.”

Several relatives and friends, with their young children, had been invited to the feast, and there were ten guests altogether, including Jennie and Gerald Federan. Jennie had not been able to see Federan alone since the night of the ball, and she had counted the moments till Sunday dawned, for she had resolved to persuade him to make their engage-

ment public. The ordeal of meeting her lover with the secret betrothal in their souls and an outward air of coldness was humiliating to her pride. Many women enjoy the ironies of a false position—it gives them a sense of cheating the world and fate; but Jennie's recklessness was defiant, and her courage loved the even, never the odd, chance. She wished to face the consequences of her actions, and the trick of slyly evading them, if possible, held no fascination for a heart as wild as a gipsy's. There were moments when Federan described this wildness, to himself, as egoism: he liked mysteriousness, and with all the influences of a small town in his blood, he liked to stimulate, baffle, and amaze provincial curiosity. On this point the faint note of antagonism between the lovers had not yet sounded its warning.

Jennie, at Miss Leddle's table, was maliciously placed between Mr Revere, the town clerk, and Mr Harding, the organist. Revere was engrossed in reckoning the amount of life still allotted to his neighbours. If any name was mentioned, he would screw up his eyes, put his head on one side, dilate his nostrils, and say, "Ah, well, I'll give him another ten years yet!" or, "He'll live to see us buried!" or, "She's bound to go before her good husband!" or "He won't live, mark my word, to scratch a grey head!" He was an agent for a Life Assurance Company, and his observations were received with painful interest. His wife, a thin woman, who sat

opposite, was encouraging her two children to eat more than Mr Harding's little girls. She smiled proudly at her hostess on the conclusion of each course, saying, "I'm really ashamed of their appetites." Mr Hamerton, a widower, and the manager of Edgeham Puddifant's Brewery, rallied the little darlings, and wagered that they would not be able to manage three helpings of cherry tart.

"What a pity it is," observed, in a loud whisper, Miss Leddle's unmarried cousin, Adelaide Mason, "that Mr Hamerton has no family! He's such a fatherly, kind man."

Harding and a certain Mr Tonge, who was a retired, well-to-do merchant, became involved in a heated discussion about the existence of God. The organist had opened peacefully over the fried soles by a reference to the miraculous draught of fishes, but by the time they had reached hot ducklings Mr Tonge's views about the moral government of the world became sinister in the extreme.

"Would a just and merciful God," said he, "allow the suffering we see daily of poor dumb animals and birds?"

He consumed half a duck, and complimented Miss Leddle on her excellent cook.

"The food melts in one's mouth," he confessed.

Mr Tonge had also views on politics: "We are all equal," he maintained. "I may be a Radical, if

you like—a revolutionist even. We are all equal in the sight of *men*."

This was his best and locally famous saying. It meant that Mr Tonge felt equal to the highest and noblest anywhere—not, of course, that the lowest and meanest were, by any chance, the equals of Mr Tonge.

The ladies kept silent, feeling it, no doubt, a privilege to hear such intellectual conversation.

"Mr Tonge's brain is so active," said Miss Mason, "that he has had erysipelas several times."

The Harding children, who caught the remark, stared at him after that till he became quite uncomfortable, and he thanked the God he did not believe in for his childless state.

Jennie scarcely spoke, and Federan, to the chagrin of his aunts, remained moody and sarcastic. He wore such a supercilious air that they were afraid he would offend their charming friends. Miss Daisy and her sister exchanged glances and looked at Jennie. It was all her fault: Gerald had been the nicest, dearest boy in the world until he had met Jennie.

After dinner, which lasted for nearly two hours, the party, most of whom had glazed eyes and an air of stupefaction, moved on to the lawn, where coffee was served and the gentlemen were allowed cigarettes.

"The smoke will keep away the gnats," said Miss Leddle, graciously.

Photograph - albums and picture - books were produced. Mrs Tonge's pet terrier, who accompanied her everywhere because she had no family, sat panting, with bulging sides, in the shade. He, too, had eaten too much, for a great treat, and because he was such a good little dog.

"How that dog enjoys life!" exclaimed Mr Revere, with something approaching envy; "and he must be getting on, too!"

Mrs Revere's children were quarrelsome and flushed: they cried, fought and suffered till the maid was called to take them to the poultry-yard, where, unobserved by tender-hearted Mr Tonge, they teased the fowls, and began to feel happier. But the little Hardings, who had not eaten enough, were wondering when they would have tea. They moped on chairs.

"What a sweet pair!" murmured Miss Mason.
"I could watch them for ever!"

Federan, unable to endure the restraint and stupidity any longer, asked Jennie to come for a walk.

"How can you stand this?" he asked angrily; "you look as though you enjoyed it!"

"You were there!" she answered, taking his arm.

"Do be careful! Some one might see us!" said the young man; but a large low cherry tree, thick with leaves, was already between them and the

guests. This was not a joyous prelude. "You are a darling," he went on, "but do remember that it is most important"—he dropped his voice still lower—"that our engagement should be kept secret."

"Still a secret? But why?—I want to understand why."

"You know what old people are—they want to know first. I must tell my father first."

"Haven't you told him yet?"

"No. I must choose the right moment. My love for you is the one good thing that ever happened to me. You believe that, don't you? Well, then, the instant the world knows about it my happiness will be poisoned. As my aunt says, 'The cat will be in the milk-jug!' She hits the truth off sometimes."

By this time they had reached the small kitchen-garden, with fine fruit-trees growing on its walls, numbers of gooseberry and currant bushes, and little beds of forget-me-not, pansies, heliotrope, and mignonette. It was very hot and sweet-smelling. Jennie sat down on a wheelbarrow and Federan on the wooden edge of the cucumber frame. This, he reflected, was very different from the ramble with Rachel Tredegar through the romantic deserted paths of the Italian garden at Franton, where marble goddesses on pedestals danced immovably to the unheard piping of a bronze Apollo. How exquisite was the silence there! how refined the life! Cypress

trees had surrounded them ; magnolias filled the air with their perfume ; the nightingales had sung ; the tender breeze blew lilac blossoms to the ground.

“And from this undefiled Paradise
The flowers . . .
When heaven’s blithe winds had unfolded them,
As mine-lamps enkindle a hidden gem,
Shone smiling to heaven, and every one
Showed joy in the light of the gentle sun.”

Here the tortoise, kept by Miss Leddle to eat insects, lumbered painfully over the gravel ; a broken watering-can and a rusty hoe suggested the many demands on the handy man’s time ; the flies buzzed and bit, and wasps were feeding odiously on the unprotected wall-fruit.

“If you have any influence with Miss Tredegar,” said Federan, “keep her up to the idea of selling Franton.”

“Why are you anxious about its sale, Gerald ?”

“Because it is a big deal,” he said deliberately. “I may as well tell you. You can be trusted—you are not like other women.” He longed to unburden his mind ; he thought he would feel less miserable if Jennie were in the plot. “I have had a private tip. There is coal on the estate.”

“Does Rachel know that ?”

“Certainly not. It has nothing to do with her. This is a speculation.”

“But it is her land.”

“It ceases to be her land after she sells it.”

"But that coal would affect the price."

"The coal is not an absolute certainty. That is our risk. We buy the land on the chance of the coal being there. Don't you see?"

"Perfectly. Will you tell her?"

"My dear child," he asked sarcastically, "is this a prayer-meeting? You don't grasp the situation. Business is business."

The hum of the bees, the scent of the plants, the heat of the sun, the fruit on the walls, and the distant cries from the poultry-yard, all blended in her remembrance of Federan's phrase, "Business is business." It seemed a long time before either he or she spoke again. She leaned forward at last, and appealed to his handsome face. "But you aren't like that, Gerald?"

"No, not by nature. I can't marry without money—can I? And I can't have money unless I make it. Don't get that strange look into those beautiful eyes."

"We can be poor. I am used to poverty."

"You know nothing about it, in reality. Do you suppose I'd drag you down to this infernal existence? How little you know me!"

"If we were together we could make our own home as we pleased, forget what we pleased, live as we pleased—"

"On what? Three-pounds-ten a week? Shall I live on my father in his old age?"

"Then we needn't marry just yet."

"We can waste all our youth in waiting! You can get tired and sallow: I can get sour and bald!" He laughed bitterly. "Say we wait two years? Too long! too long! We sha'n't be waiting for dead men's shoes: we shall be waiting for the death of our own passions."

"You think too much of riches and pleasure," said the girl. "I'll love you more when you are sour and bald, because I'll know what made you so."

"Pleasure!" repeated Federan: "is this pleasure? To broil out here in the sun—because I can see you nowhere else in peace—and quarrel about squalid affairs—because I can't exist, it would seem, without squalor,—and wonder how I can least disgracefully earn enough money to keep a wife? Pleasure! I saw a play in Paris once, about two people who loved each other. They hadn't a penny—yet they dined at restaurants! They lived in an attic full of roses—yet no one ever asked them for rent. The girl was always pretty, the man was always gay. It was all smiles and sunshine and enjoyment. How was it done?"

"That was only a play."

"You have said it! Let us, therefore, consider actual things."

Jennie sighed. "If Rachel sells Franton, who will pay her?"

"The Syndicate. They are Coolidge's backers.

He has got the backers; they rely on him, and he relies on me."

"It sounds like the house that Jack built!" said Jennie, in despair.

"Miss Tredegar can take shares in the company after it is floated. But you must see that the risk is ours. We take the land; we cannot swear to the coal. I wish every transaction were half as clean." He tried to remember all that Coolidge had told him.

"Why not put the chance before Rachel?" asked Jennie.

"She might refuse to sell, or she would ask too great a price for the land. As it is, she has no anxiety."

"But where did Coolidge get his report?"

"From Paxton & Grainger's expert."

"Paxton & Grainger? Why, that is John Harlowe's firm. He has been to Spain and to America and to West Africa for them. He can tell you much better than Coolidge."

"I don't want him," said Federan, shortly.

"But you want to know the truth. You don't want to make mistakes, or lose your friend's money?"

"I want Harlowe to mind his own business."

"That is his business," she said, with her eyes full of tears. "How can you speak so to me?"

He was immediately repentant: took her in his arms; kissed her reproachful lips, the tears from her eyes, and her white throat.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I'm not myself. It's hard to love you so much and to feel under such accursed restraint. If you follow your heart at every turn you'll follow a bad guide. I'll never again revive this dreadful talk. We'll forget it."

While he could feel her in his arms he did forget everything that troubled him, and, as sweet music lulls a sensitive listener, her body charmed away his ill-humour and his gloomy forebodings.

"For such a wife," he said, "what would I not do!"

The instinctive certainty that he really loved her was still so strong that Jennie, too, forgot how unhappy she had been a moment before. She was conscious only of his handsome face and his strength and his earnest voice and his thrilling kisses. When she tried to speak, she could not.

"You're not angry with me, Jennie?"

She shook her head.

"I suppose it wouldn't seem fair to the others," he went on, "if we had so much love and a great fortune as well! Do you wish you had never seen me? Ah, let us be like this always—never any other way—but always like this!"

As they returned to the group on the lawn, Miss Mason was leading the alarmed Mr Hamerton toward the pig-sty. He was fond of the black sow, and it gave him innocent delight to poke her sides with his walking-stick. But the presence of the simpering

young woman disturbed, on this occasion, the innocence of Mr Hamerton's bliss.

"That man is really a pearl among men!" said Mrs Tonge.

The Hardings and the Reveres were leaving; Federan had to assist his aunts in speeding the parting guests. Jennie stole away alone to the kitchen-garden, and lived again, in memory, through her last minutes there with Gerald. They had been brief, but their spell was still upon her: the narrow walls seemed to melt, like clouds, and the vision beyond was a lovely scene of light, and flowery fields, calm-flowing rivers, and terraces as stairs reaching to the sky. She thought she could fly forth on wings to that lovely world: nay, was she not there already?

"So you have wandered here!" said Miss Leddle, coming in, followed by a party, at the green door; "I want to show the pump to Mr Harding."

CHAPTER XIII

"Il a prêché que ce monde n'est qu'un songe, que tout est ici-bas image et figure, que le vrai royaume de Dieu, c'est l'idéal, que l'idéal appartient à tous."

ERNEST RENAN.

Two weeks after Miss Leddle's birthday party the negotiations in connection with the sale of Franton Manor were complete. Federan, pursued by his own scruples, smarting under the memory of Jennie's upbraiding, had silenced his conscience by refusing firmly to advise the acceptance of the first offer. "It is too little," he maintained. It happened, also, that Mrs Helmyng, the artist's mother, consulted him about the investment of a small legacy which she had unexpectedly, or, as Federan thought, providentially received, and this contribution was added, therefore, to the original price. The purchase-money, collected thus from various sources, was presented to Rachel Tredegar in the form of a cheque drawn by Coolidge for fifteen thousand pounds. When Gerald handed it to her she exclaimed: "The price of a few happy days! I don't want it," and her eyes filled with tears, which, because she made no effort to control

them, rolled prettily in glittering drops down her cheeks.

He could not pretend to misunderstand such words, or the impassioned glance which accompanied them. The happy days had been the days he and she had spent together discussing the details of the sale.

"Where am I to go? what am I to do?" she asked.

They were in the morning-room—a large upper apartment which contained some old French furniture upholstered in faded yellow silk. A Louis XVI. chandelier with pear-shaped lustres hung from the ceiling: on one of the mahogany and malachite consoles was a rare *jardinière en éventail* of apple-green Sèvres, much gilded, and on the other stood a Louis Quinze clock supported by figures of Loves holding up garlands. The walls, covered with Beauvais tapestry, were intersected by three large windows, which, overhung by very faded crimson brocade hangings, looked out on a part of the grounds, half natural and half artificial, known as The Paysage. This quiet grove, in which Corot might have set his innocent nymphs, was formed by willow trees and tall acacias, so planted that, but for the sky which showed through the open spaces in the distance, the light, on a bright day, would seem as soft, green, and subtle as the light of the moon. Wild flowers, vines and ferns covered the ground; far off the blue sea swayed almost voluptuously against cliffs which

looked grey in the strong glare, and the crests of the hills which flushed into the white horizon seemed like rose-coloured clouds.

Watching this scene on such a day, the last owner of Franton had sunk into her last sleep; and Rachel, who had an instinct for dramatic contrast, chose that room in which to sign away her inheritance.

"What am I to do?" she repeated.

She was sitting, in a white lace dress, on a carved white-and-gold arm-chair. On the table by her side, a gilt Bacchante, holding a bunch of grapes and uplifting a thyrsus with vine-stems, supported a bronze candelabrum. Rachel, as she spoke, stroked the Bacchante's feet, and displayed, at the same time, the curious eighteenth-century rings on her own nervous fingers.

"I am under a curse, Mr Federan," she said: "I am afraid no one and nothing can save me. Renan has written somewhere that the real kingdom of God is the kingdom of ideals. No doubt he meant ideals of a certain kind. There are other ideals which make the real hell of the damned. That is my city."

These strong words, uttered by a fragile, almost consumptive woman, whose face was now distorted by emotion, seemed a voice from another world.

"You are too much alone," exclaimed Federan: "everyone says so."

A strange sly smile was the only reply she offered,

and he found himself counting her rings to see whether they made one of the lucky numbers.

"I want you to feel satisfied, you know, about this sale," he said presently.

"I am perfectly satisfied, thank you. I shall go to India."

"Why so far?"

"You don't understand,—it is still too near. I am flying away from my own thoughts."

Before he answered he thought he would look in the mirror. He did so, and found Rachel herself gazing earnestly at his reflection. She had been watching it the whole time. Their eyes, after the surprise and self-consciousness caused by this encounter in the looking-glass, moved and met more directly face to face.

"I wish I could help you," said Federan, with less distinctness than usual. He advanced suggestions about travelling, and he referred to his own constant longing to see other lands. He pointed out that a man's true bent is always, in the beginning of life, as much unknown to himself as to others. Why was it, then, a matter of surprise that a man should differ so widely from himself at different times, and, after acquiescence in one mode of living, reject what was once his best ambition? "Let me confess it," he owned. "I envy you. When you leave Franton, I shall feel left behind."

"But I am going alone," she said quickly.

"You ought not to go alone."

"Do you want me to take Miss Sussex!" said Rachel.

He felt the blood rush from his heart to his brows. The girl, then, suspected the truth, and the moment had come for him to declare it. If he loved Jennie there was no more to be said. But the knowledge that he had urged the sale of Franton for his own advantage made him ashamed; he feared Rachel's cleverness and her scorn; he knew, too, that she was capable of cancelling the agreement.

"What has Miss Sussex to do with the question?" he asked.

"I thought you might wish her to remain here with you," answered Rachel.

"She never entered my mind—till you spoke of her a minute ago."

This was not wholly a falsehood, but had it been possible to recall his words the moment after they were uttered, he would have done so. He no longer coveted the many beautiful objects in the room; and, with sickness in his spirit, he almost wished for a sight of the dusty high-road and the days of his humble ambitions. Yet there was something in Rachel herself—a delicacy of body, a lassitude of soul—which seemed to penetrate and fascinate his own indolence. Their effect was to make him equivocal in speech, unwilling to think, as languid in all his desires as he was in his remorse: watching her, he lost equally the

power to sustain a purpose or a scruple ; he asked himself whether serious love was not a dream, and the very transaction in which he was engaged seemed remote and unreal. But there was a surging oppression in his heart and a singing in his ears ; a fermentation of his senses which flowed from his feet to his head as a kind of madness. What did it mean ? Before this, his life and his sensations had been simple enough : his loves, his moods of tenderness, and his admirations had amused and satisfied him ; but Rachel called to some reluctant force in his being of which he seemed to have no experience, and over which he had, apparently, no control. She was the incarnation of all that subtly weakened and undermined his character — the yearnings for luxury, idleness, sensuous refinements, and disguised sensuality. He feared her, distrusted her, hated her, but as a man fears, distrusts and hates his own secret vice. Through this enervating obsession, the remembrance of Jennie's purity rang out clearly at intervals as the warning bell of a buoy in dangerous waters.

"I thought Jennie was a great friend of yours," said Rachel ; "she told me so."

He explained that people, living under the same roof and meeting almost daily at the same table, became, without knowing it, intimate. "She is a charming girl," he added hastily. Then he went further, and pointed out that no one stood answerable for the treacheries of animal magnetism.

“That’s a strange subject,” said Rachel, with a prudish air, which pleased him by its modesty without discouraging the turn of their conversation.

“Animal magnetism makes half the sweetness and all the trouble of life !” he explained.

She assented, but acknowledged, at the same time, her ignorance of scientific laws. All she knew was that outside the walls, beyond that garden of peace full of soft sounds, fragrant air, and flowery walks, there were the suffering, toiling poor, and lonely people weeping in solitude. “I have wept, nevertheless, as bitterly as any of them !” she said.

The occasional sharp cries and twitterings of birds, the bark of a dog, the heavy roll of cart-wheels in the distance, the report from the woods of some rabbit shooter’s gun were all that disturbed that pastoral silence, a silence which makes sometimes for sadness and sometimes for a numbness of the faculties.

““ I have no great good hap in all my days,
Nor much good cause to make me glad of God !””

continued Rachel, “but I have acquired a certain patience—‘the last save death !’”

Federan smiled enviously and with resentment because she had never felt the need of money. He wondered what she could have wept over, and reflected that she did not know when she was well off. “Good Lord !” he thought, “how people alter !

Once I mooned about the fields thinking of love. Now I want nothing on earth except a fortune. If this silly fool were to spend even one sleepless night over money matters, she'd change her tune. How people alter! Good Lord!" His outward air remained sympathetic, attentive, and indulgent.

She complained that all the hours, ideas, ardour and delight one had for the beautiful and divine things of life, such as art, love, travel, friendship, were exhausted in the struggle for gain and wealth.

"Although I want wealth," he said, "it is not for the pleasure, God knows, or the excitement of business, but in order to enjoy the very things of which you speak. Happiness is expensive: mere respectability costs so much. I say this from morning till night, and perhaps I am bitter on the subject. Still, if one is truthful, there is nothing else to say. Shall I be a hypocrite?"

At every beat of her heart, Rachel fancied that she heard his beating in response, and she was under the dominion of an irresistible impulse to touch him, to gaze through his eyes to the very depths of his soul, and cast her shadow there. She swayed in his direction as a vine seems to grow toward a tree, and as the morning mist will hang round a root, her will enveloped his. All her hope and all her happiness depended on him, she told herself. Was he not the one relief she had ever found for the starving egoism of her own nature? She had come to the

end of her resources—she could no longer feed upon her own fancies. They had failed her at last, and she knew her own desolation. In every imaginary scene in which she had acted a romantic part, she had prepared herself for this actual crisis. Reality to some dreamers is a pain or a disappointment: to others it is a kind of drunkenness which never grows sober. In Rachel's case experience proved intoxicating; dreams, which she had once thought the exquisite and true side of existence, the real kingdom of man, already seemed thin, colourless, futile; and her first sip of life made her desperate for the whole draught. "Here is a human being I can look at with my eyes wide open," she confessed to herself. When he was not there her days seemed endless: she watched the clock, and started at every sound. His presence had become a necessity—not as the beloved is always longed for, but as the tortured mind or body cries out for some stilling drug. While Federan was with her, she could forget her sickly and fancied disabilities for leading the life common to women—women who loved plain men blindly, questioned never, suffered the pangs of brutes, and rejoiced over coarse and dissonant joys. Was not their blindness the truest vision? Were their pangs merely brutal, and their joys so coarse? Brutality and coarseness began to take, to her mind, weary of the factitious and insincere, other names, other shapes.

One morning, after Federan had left her, she

picked up a clod of fresh turf full of live worms and insects. "The earth!" she exclaimed, and kissed it. "Why have I hated you so long? But I didn't understand." She wondered, nevertheless, why she did not shudder, and she was amiable all that day because she had conquered, without an effort, a repugnance she had once believed invincible.

She told Federan the story, and added: "I can see beauty now in worms. I want to love them?"

He considered this sentiment morbid—if not a little mad; but he said aloud she was full of original ideas and always gave him something to think about. His reply made her wince: it seemed to her *très paysan*, yet she was flattered none the less, and tried to twist the words "You are full of original ideas" into something approaching a declaration of love. Was it his awkward way of paying a compliment? "You always give me something to think about." Did he wish her to know that she had a power over his soul?

"You find it hard, sometimes, to form decisions," she said, presently, "and this makes you misleading."

"Never wilfully or deliberately so," he replied.

They talked for an hour on abstract ideas and vague suppositions; the man cautious, ill at ease, and double-voiced: the woman listening as one listens to a foreign language, translating the ambiguous into her own idiom. After he had gone she rushed to Jennie, who was dressing for dinner.

"I can't dine—I can't eat!" exclaimed Rachel: "food sticks in my throat. Sing me something! Sing to me! Sing Kundry's song to Parsifal."

She burst into tears at the first chord, and moaned the notes to herself, under her breath, while Jennie sang.

"That Mr Federan is *très paysan*," she said superciliously, in the middle of the song; "but he is very good-looking, and so sane. So sane!"

Federan, meanwhile, as he walked away to his aunt's house, jerked his shoulders as though he were shaking off some clinging grasp, and he tried to remember what he had said to give Miss Tredegar the impression that Jennie was no more to him than any other young girl of his acquaintance. He had asserted nothing, denied nothing. Miss Leddle and Miss Daisy, noting his sombre face when he entered, became uneasy. They were pleased at his new friendship with Miss Tredegar, and they had owned to each other, in long pleasant conversations, the strong probability of a marriage taking place between their nephew and the heiress. They now referred to Jennie thus: "As for that girl——!" Miss Leddle had received many unaccustomed marks of peculiar deference from the tradespeople since Federan had been seen driving constantly to Franton Manor. Mrs Puddifant, after a University Extension meeting at Mrs Gillespie's, had drawn Miss Daisy aside in order to recommend her own dress-

maker, a person of great taste and reasonable charges. She went so far in affable condescension as to lift up a corner of her own overskirt in order to show Miss Daisy the excellent quality of the foundation, the sewing and the trimmings. This gracious act was symbolic of the county's attitude: the Misses Leddle were found worthy to consider the quality of its foundations personally exhibited, and the Misses Leddle, who had always been too poor and too exclusive to seek rich society, were now flattered by their own hopes and Mrs Puddifant's genial advances.

"These Cumborough people," said Miss Leddle, "are well enough, after all, if one knows how to take them!"

Miss Daisy owned that Mrs Puddifant was as much a lady, *considering*, as any she had ever met, and in good breeding a miss, as all the world knew, was as good as a mile. In the use of figure Miss Daisy abhorred precision, and when Federan pointed out the absence of any connecting link between the idea of a mile and the idea of good manners, the lady thanked God she was no pedant.

"I suppose you saw Jennie?" she said.

"No," said Federan, shortly.

"You may depend," said Miss Daisy to her sister when the two were alone, later, "that girl has given him the right to be rude. He's tired of her."

Miss Leddle hoped so. "Miss Tredegar is such a sweet, ladylike creature," she added.

In her heart she preferred Jennie. So, too, did Miss Daisy. But it made them shiver agreeably all over when they indulged in spite — perhaps because they allowed themselves that pleasure so seldom.

CHAPTER XIV

“Presque tous les hommes d'action inclinent à la fatalité, de même que la plupart des penseurs inclinent à la Providence.”
BALZAC.

YAFFORD, which was a small harbour in the reign of Henry II., is now the county town of Frampshire. It stands in a hollow surrounded by hills from which the River Wellow runs to join the Franton stream on its way to the sea. On market-days the High Street, with its few fine Jacobean buildings, gabled and ivy-clad, would be filled by farmers, shepherds, carriers, butchers, and land-agents, carts and horses, vans and donkeys, dogs, boys, and smiling young women. The “Wheatsheaf Inn” and the “Bugle,” both popular houses, would have their bars, parlours, and stables overcrowded: the bleating of sheep and the lowing of cattle would mingle with the sound of voices, the cracking of whips, and the rumble of wheels on cobble-stones. But, at other times, the town would be silent, and during summer the flies droning on the blinds, and during winter the frozen water cracking in the cisterns, would be all that was audible in the drowsy thoroughfares.

The office of the house occupied by the elder Federan, and in which the business of the firm, Messrs Federan & Son, was transacted, faced the Town Hall, a picturesque old building of the fifteenth century, with a solar or range of open shops outside. The office walls were lined by deed-boxes bearing county names of distinction, and enlarged maps of various private estates. The diagram, for instance, of Mr Puddifant's Grange was somewhat larger than the map of Europe. A large table covered with papers, files, deeds of every description, and reference books, stood near a globe and a copying-press in the middle of the room. A small black cat dozed all day on the green rep curtains which trailed a yard or so on the floor, and a photograph of the senior partner in the Seventies, with his wife, and Gerald, as a child in christening robes, hung in a carved oak frame over the mantelpiece. The wheeled-chair in which old Federan now sat for a few hours each morning was rolled near his mahogany desk in front of the window. Here, when work was slack, a musical-box in a rose-wood case (purchased at the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace of 1851) would be opened, wound up, and set playing for the old solicitor's amusement: he never wearied of "Robert, toi que j'aime," "Drink to me only with thine eyes," "Flow gently, sweet Afton," and "The Overture to Zampa." He had been what is called a fine figure of a man in his youth, but he was now bent by disease, and his face, which

had once been handsome, had so dwindled with the years that it seemed to consist of a twitching mouth only, while his eyelids, weighed down by long white lashes, fell so heavily over his eyes that he appeared almost sightless.

A week after Gerald's final interview with Rachel, Federan senior was sitting as usual in his chair, making laborious entries in a note-book, and glancing up at intervals at the clock. Sometimes he rang a small hand-bell by his side, and, when the summons was answered by the office-boy, he would ask in querulous tones whether Mr Gerald had not arrived yet. On receiving a negative reply he would shake his head, frown, and continue his difficult calculations. The bell of the Grammar-School had barely finished striking the closing-hour, and the laughter and cries of the liberated boys were filling the High Street, when the younger Federan entered the office. He had been to Edinburgh for a client, and the fatigue of the long journey offered an acceptable explanation for his haggard appearance.

"I've been working out some of your ideas," said his father, irritably, "and I'll have nothing to do with them. I follow them quite well, but I will have nothing to do with them."

Gerald controlled an angry reply, and, leaning affectionately over the old man's shoulder, closed the book in which he was making, with a paralysed hand, illegible figures.

"My dear father," said he, "in your state of health, why try and mix in these things? Why not leave them to me?"

"I have been in this business now for fifty years, and my father before me. I do not pretend to keep pace with these modern notions in the way of speculation, but there are certain ideas of honesty which I hope will never grow old-fashioned. I don't see how you could have advised Miss Tredegar to accept Coolidge's offer. Besides, can Coolidge pay? That is the point."

"Would he make the offer," said Gerald, impatiently, "if he could not stand to it? I don't suppose it is his own money."

"Then whose money is it?"

"I don't think that is our business. A man planks down his fifteen thousand pounds on the table, I don't see that we have any right to ask him where it comes from. If the money is not his, then the estate is not his. You cannot put a house and four hundred acres of land in your coat pocket and walk off with it. You are getting fussy, father!"

"I know that Coolidge has no money of his own," said the old man, obstinately, "and I know that if there is any purchaser who is willing to pay fifteen thousand pounds for the Franton estate, he would be perfectly willing to pay a great deal more. But he wouldn't employ Coolidge. That is not Coolidge's line of business at all, and, in fact, there are a good

many things I want to ask you about—things that are puzzling me more than I like. Now, what about your aunt's seven thousand that has to be re-invested? And then that mortgage down at Doulton—and that legacy of Mrs Helmyng's?"

The young man wiped his forehead and strolled over to the window.

"Here am I barely back from that niggling business at Edinburgh," he exclaimed. "Do give me a moment's breathing space. It is all right. You have been too ill—I couldn't rush up to you with every little note and every twopenny-halfpenny transaction. It is all right, I tell you. Will you wait till Sunday? I can give you everything you want to know on Sunday afternoon."

"I never work on Sundays. It has always been my principle not to work on Sundays, and, please God, I will not do so now. Sunday is a day of rest."

"Well then, Monday. I have got the most awful headache from this east wind."

As he spoke, he noticed the form of Mrs Coolidge advancing up the street, and, as she was a woman who rarely ventured out, he was filled with a sudden, instinctive apprehension that she was the bearer of disturbing news. She was tall and slim, with large swaying hips, and the shoulders of an immature girl. Her face, which had once been of the type associated with the drawings of Burne Jones, was now ruined from the stress of constant anxieties, and grown almost waxen

from a life of many illnesses passed indoors. There was something ominous in the mere outline of this living diagram of disappointment, grief, and despair. As she halted at the street door below, the young man's heart sank, and heavy lines, already too set for his age, appeared as suddenly on his brow as wrinkles do on the smooth sands after a wearing tide.

"There is somebody coming now," he said; "I wonder what she wants."

"Who is it?" said his father.

Gerald was about to give the name, when he checked himself and lied without hesitation: "It is Mrs Taylor."

"I can see her," said old Federan. "She has come about the land over by Woodbury."

"You can't see her: it is out of the question," said Gerald, firmly. "Now do be guided by me. You will kill yourself. Shall I see her here or shall I go out?" He put his hand on the back of the chair.

"Wheel me out—do!" said the senior partner, bitterly. "I can see you don't want me. I am in your way in more senses than one. Wheel me out by all means!"

Gerald shrugged his shoulders with impatience, wheeled the old man into the adjoining room, in which they usually took their meals, and closed the double doors which divided the living rooms of the house from the office.

Mrs Coolidge, as she entered, lifted her veil to its

usual line just over her eyebrows, and sank into the first chair she saw.

"Bert has gone!" she said, in a voice which had become a chronic moan.

"Gone? Gone where?" asked Federan.

"The old fit has come over him again. He has been as good as gold for months, but lately, when he has been alone, that restlessness—you know it—began. Very kind to me and the children. I know what that means: he sees the fit coming himself."

"Where has he gone?"

"Oh, he has gone a long way this time. To California. You know he went to town about that business for you? That was about a fortnight ago. When did you last hear from him?"

"I heard yesterday."

"Oh, you don't know him! He had arranged that with one of his friends. Writes letters ahead and has them posted from day to day. He has played that trick with me often. But that isn't the worst. He has got that money."

"Good God!"

"That fifteen thousand. You were wrong to trust him. He must never be trusted with money. He has been paying off a few debts here to make it easier for me and the children, but he has drawn most of it and has got it with him."

"But he wouldn't ruin me! He knows perfectly well—"

"But you know as well as I do that nothing stands in his way when the fit is on. He'll make his calculations for months in advance. He knows when the fit will take him, and he prepares for it. He'll get the money somehow."

"Well, if he has let me in for some of the money, perhaps I could still keep things going on the general scheme."

Mrs Coolidge gave her rare, gay, and always inappropriate laugh—the one thing left from her youth : "Don't you believe it ! That report from Paxton & Grainger was a fake. Didn't he want the money, and don't you suppose that he knew Miss Leddle's seven thousand was waiting for re-investment ?"

"A forged report !"

"He's very clever. . ."

"But the seven thousand pounds . . . you don't understand. It is not my loss—it is my aunt's money—trust money. I am responsible for it. And the rest ? And the cheque—Miss Tredegar's cheque ?"

"It will be dishonoured," said Mrs Coolidge. "You can't get blood out of a stone, and when you have been through as much as I have, you'll understand that."

"But there's his letter to me—that's enough. It is posted from London, and he dated it yesterday . . . I can't believe—"

"He is in California at this very moment."

"You take it very quietly, I must say—my ruin !"

"If I can stand *his* ruin, I can stand yours—can't I? And if I have had fifteen years of this, you don't expect me to find it more of a worry than usual! I've got three children to think of. I've got to keep up for their sakes. As for revenge you can do what you please—if you can catch him. I don't feel that anything could hurt me now. When a train passes over a living person, it kills 'em, but the iron rails get used to it and it doesn't hurt 'em. I'm no longer a woman, I think I'm an iron rail. I'm going back now. I'm very sorry, but I have always told you not to trust him."

She was too agonised by the miseries of her own position to pay much heed to Coolidge's dupe, and, having delivered her tidings, she disappeared as ungraciously as she had entered. Federan, stunned, sat at the table with his arms stretched out straight in front of him and his empty hands extended palms upward. All the beauty had gone from his countenance, which was livid, and his eyes seemed to be fixed upon some threatening vision. What was to be done? Why had Coolidge deceived him? If there were no thousands at the bank for Rachel—the sale would be null and void. She, at least, would lose nothing. But who was to refund the Syndicate's money? He saw himself facing Colonel Howland, Mr Lux and Mr Sarramy, all of whom had subscribed to the purchase fund. "And why am I in this position?" he thought; "why? because I loved a woman and trusted a friend."

It seemed too hard, and yet he knew that the story could never be made to sound so piteous to others as it did to himself.

“I shall be blamed.” Again he was conscious of making an under-statement. The threatening vision before him was not blame—but ruin ; the humiliating and gloomy bodings in his mind were not delusions but the actual consequences of his folly. Before he could perceive the reality of the danger, or the preciousness of the time still left him, three visitors were announced. As he read their names on the slate brought in by the office-boy, he became ghastly. The cruelty, without motive and without end, of men toward each other, pierced his soul, and he asked himself why such things were. He meant so well, he asked so little ; why, then, at the thought of meeting his fellow creatures at a disadvantage did he feel such a weight at his heart—such a terror and such a repugnance in his mind? “We all want to get on ; we all want happiness and a few pleasures.” The boys playing and shouting in the street below reminded him of his own careless childhood, and he wished he was dead. Then he thought how terrible it was that a man of his age and abilities and vigour should be driven by the harshness of fate to prefer a grave to the world. But the appeal to death was insincere. The strength of body and the desire of the eyes which had led him into sin made him eager to live and to enjoy, and under all his melancholy,

the pulse of life kept up its valiant beat—there was force in his muscles, swift blood in his veins, and a tingling in his nerves. His time had surely not come yet. Death—for him? Had he not been looking forward to the little house in Leicester, with its perfumed garden, and the twittering swallows, the doves on the lawn, and the rose leaves drying in the sun. Was he to go, after all, to that centre of the earth where there would be no one ever to share the burden of solitude and the woes of longing? He thought of Jennie and her beauty, of his ideals, of his love, and the image of death faded as the moon in early morning fades in the shining of the sun.

When the tramp of men's footsteps on the staircase reached his ear, the instincts and habit of physical courage stood him in good stead; the determination to overcome his difficulties gave him the flush and aspect of success. He rose, opened the door wide and welcomed the callers as though they had arrived, by a happy accident, in time to hear some fortunate news.

Colonel Howland, the leader, was a retired officer of mild, grey and well-bred appearance, dressed in a blue serge suit, and carrying a straw hat. Mr Lux belonged to the tradesman class of the old school. He wore small reddish side-whiskers, his complexion was florid, and his sharp eyes imprisoned a cautious geniality. Mr Sarramy was thin, nervous,

and sullen ; his frock-coat was too long and his trousers were too narrow. When he accepted the chair which Federan offered him, he sat turning his silk hat round and round by the brim as though he were shaking bad flour through a sieve. Terriers have been known to inherit the begging trick from a trained mother. Mr Sarramy's maternal grandfather had kept a general store in Cape Colony.

"I have called about that Franton investment," said Mr Lux, looking at his companions for support ; "we have been waiting for that further communication. And then, as you told me it would mean a railway for certain, I made a bid for that property to the north of Franton. If coal is in one place, you must get it to another !" Here he gazed first at the Ordnance map of Franton where it hung on the wall, and then at Colonel Howland, a timid man. "I was the first to think of that—yet it is as plain as A B C," he added ; "still, it's a speculative venture."

"If you're nervous, I'll buy in your shares," said Federan, with audacity.

"A deal is a deal," said Sarramy ; "if you can reassure us, we will stand to our bargain, but we must know where we are."

Federan threw back his head, and smiled. "This is not a company, gentlemen ; this is a strictly confidential and private enterprise. It's not a big concern, so far as the preliminary output goes."

"The land purchase, that is to say," observed Howland, speaking for the first time.

Mr Sarramy paused in his operations with the imaginary sieve. "You can't work mines for nothing. Expenses later will be enormous."

"It's a speculation, isn't it? If you lose your head, there is no chance for anybody," said Federan.

Mr Lux found this remark intolerable, and he hastened to beg, ironically, Mr Federan's pardon.

"This is not a speculation," said he, "this is an investment—'as safe as the Bank of England'—those were your very words."

"How much money have you got in the concern?" said Federan. "Two hundred pounds? Well, what's that? It's always somebody with two hundred pounds in the concern who makes all this row!"

Mr Sarramy put his hat on the floor and stood up. "Not at all! Right is right, and I don't mind waiting; but I must see hope for my grandchildren, if not for myself."

Here his voice broke, rather from anger than any softer emotion.

"Yes, but you oughtn't to get uneasy over it every other day," said Gerald. "Why, in South Africa and in the States—"

"We are not in the States," said Lux.

"Perhaps," said Colonel Howland, timidly, "Mr

Federan wishes to say that one cannot expect an immediate profit even from the safest enterprise."

Gerald threw a grateful glance in the Colonel's direction. It implied that he felt the immeasurable advantage of having at least one gentleman to deal with. "Colonel Howland has put the case in a nutshell. I can't conduct business on these lines, Mr Lux. If I put a proposition before you, you think well of it, and you put your money into it, and I put mine, I deny your right to come badgering me because I can't show you an immediate hundred per cent. profit. It is ridiculous! Why, we have only just acquired the land. It is precisely ten days since Miss Tredegar agreed to sell Franton. All I can say is—if any of you are dissatisfied, I shall be extremely pleased to buy you out; but you must give me notice, of course. I don't walk about with fifteen thousand pounds in my waistcoat pocket! I should have to realise some of my private securities."

"We don't wish to press at all," interposed Sarramy, a little pacified at the mention of securities; "but certain rumours—"

"The fact is," said Lux, with an unpremeditated air of confidence, "we have just heard that Coolidge is in it. Coolidge hasn't a very good name, and he has been paying his bills lately."

Gerald seemed amazed. "I'm sorry that it goes against a man to hear that he is paying his debts."

"But what on—what on?" said Mr Lux, darkly ;
"that is my question."

Again Colonel Howland betrayed the greatest discomfort. "Don't you think, Mr Lux, that perhaps names ought not to be mentioned?"

"I don't want any false politeness," said Lux ; "I shall have my say."

"Coolidge has as much right to join the Syndicate as you have, and, if you get your money back—"

"I want more than my money back!" said Lux, with indignation. "I want my time, I want my interest, I want my wear and tear, I want my influence! Do you suppose that Mr Sarramy would have put in but for me? Do you suppose that Colonel Howland—"

"I don't suppose anything," said Gerald. "I have given you my answer. I say I'll buy you out. I'll give you your interest—a fortnight's interest on two hundred pounds! That won't be much."

Sarramy was for mildness. "We only ask to be reassured."

"Yes, reassured," said Howland.

"Well, gentlemen, you can be perfectly assured that whether there is coal on the Franton estate or not, you shall not lose a penny—not a penny—not if I sell all I possess!"

"No heroics, please, Mr Federan," said Mr Sarramy, in his loftiest manner ; "I still think we might be kept better informed of what is going on."

"Utter nonsense! You can't do business that way."

"Well, could you give us an undertaking?" suggested Sarramy.

"No; I will not give any undertaking," said Gerald. "I give you my word. It is between gentlemen. If that isn't good enough for you, you can take any other line you please. Get the town crier, bellow all over Yafford that there is coal on the Franton estate—give away the whole show! You were perfectly willing to come in, and it was on the strict understanding that everything should be kept quiet until the sale was completed. If you want more shareholders in the concern, I can get them; but, of course, that means a greater division of the profits."

"We don't want to be precipitate," said Sarramy, uneasily. "We don't want to lose our tempers."

Lux agreed. "No, no!" said he.

"Then, perhaps, Mr Federan will send us a line in the course of the next few days," said Colonel Howland, rising; "that seems fair."

"Fair! I should think so! The wonder is this town sticks together! Why don't the very bricks pull apart?" asked Gerald. "You are so blind to your own interests. The moment a good thing comes along each one tries to see if he can circumvent it. He will cut off his nose to spite his face. You can't wonder that the best brains of this

country go to the Colonies and America. They won't stand your pettifogging ways!"

"Well, I'm a bit quick-tempered," owned Lux, "but, so long as you say we can rely on the integrity of the affair, we need not detain you any longer to-day. So I will say good-morning."

They shook hands all round and smiled.

"We understand each other, I'm sure," said Federan.

"Quite so, quite so. Good-day," Colonel Howland murmured, and being still the leader by right of social precedence, he went first down the staircase.

Lux and Sarramy cautiously studied each other behind his back. They thought they would save their money, but they doubted whether they would make any profit by the transaction. So they each nourished a grievance, and their steps were slow.

CHAPTER XV

“We are
League-sundered by the silent gulf between.
You burly lovers on the village green,
Yours is a lower and a happier star.”

GEORGE MEREDITH.

JENNIE was waiting below in the narrow hall when the three men came out. Mr Sarramy winked at Mr Lux as they recognised her figure, and Colonel Howland acknowledged her bow coldly. His wife disapproved of the girl, and although he thought his wife in the wrong, he felt bound to preserve the severity of the family attitude. But Jennie ran lightly past them up the uncarpeted oak staircase till she reached Federan's office, the door of which still stood open. He was pacing the floor, and talking to his housekeeper.

“I'm all right,” he was saying; “take the musical box to my father. Keep it playing, it won't disturb me.”

As he swung round he saw Jennie, and for a minute he feared his eyes were playing him some trick.

"I was just thinking of you," he said. "But why on earth have you come here? A most foolish thing to do—but come in."

He was glad to see her, nevertheless, and his glance passed with pleasure over the details of her face and her dress.

"I had to come," said Jennie, who, he noticed, was pale. "I must warn you. Coolidge has been lying to you. There is no coal in the Franton district. Paxton's report was quite the other way. I know this for a fact. I wrote up to Mr Harlowe, and here is his copy of the real report." She held out a letter.

"So," said Gerald, with a sneer, "Harlowe has been interfering?"

"Yes, he has," said Jennie, "in your interests. I hope it isn't too late. The Syndicate will say they have been deceived. There is no coal."

Gerald smiled coldly. "I know that as well as you do."

"You know it?"

"I know it now, and I'm landed."

"Have you known it all along!"

"Does a man for choice court disaster? I'm in for it now, and there's only one way out of it. I must square the Syndicate somehow. They are local men—Colonel Howland, Lux the wine-merchant, and Sarramy—all quite solid. We wanted to keep it a little local ring. I arranged it in perfect good faith.

Coolidge has made a fool of me." For the first time that day he seemed on the point of losing his self-control. His attachment to Coolidge was still strong, and he was not dead to the agony of his betrayal by a friend; but he cleared his throat, shifted the ink-bottles on the table, and went on: "If I sacrifice you over it, don't I sacrifice myself? Don't I give up everything I care for? I've got to find the money and buy these fellows out."

"But you haven't got the money," said Jennie.

"I shall borrow it."

"How much?"

"Fifteen thousand pounds."

"Fifteen thousand! On what security?"

"How you do pester one! A good deal of money passes through our hands."

"It isn't trust money, is it, Gerald?"

"No—well, that is—yes, in a way. But it is all safe-guarded."

"How safe-guarded?"

"You don't understand. Coolidge has gone off with fifteen thousand of the money himself—cleared out with it—and he knows I daren't say a word, because he could give away the whole plan, and our business here would be completely ruined. I should be done for. Now, there is only one thing I can do; the idea came to me like a flash." Here he paused. The thought was evidently easier than its expression in words. He drummed with his fingers on the

window-pane, and Jennie could hear the musical-box in the next room tinkling out "Sweet Afton." "I may as well tell you," continued Federan; "it is not an idea I'm proud of, but it is a way out. I must put the whole case before Miss Tredegar. I cannot say what view she will take of it. It isn't my fault; I've been let in. Now is your chance to show how you care for me—if you do!"

He did not recognise himself in this speech, and it did not represent his feeling, or what he would have wished to say. He repeated mechanically, "Now is your chance to show how you care for me—if you do."

Jennie said nothing, but he answered her silence.

"You can't think any worse of me than I think of myself. I am playing as low down as I can play, but I'm in a corner and I'm fighting for my life. I've got my back to the wall and I appeal to you! I ask you to stand by me. You're the only woman in the world I ever cared for, and if you turn against me and betray everything I've told you in confidence and set her mind against me, which you could do, I shall be ruined."

"Do you expect me to help you to deceive Rachel?" said Jennie, quietly.

"I am not deceiving her."

"You must be deceiving one of us."

Jennie told her story in quick phrases. Rachel had entered her room late the night before, knelt

down by her bed, and said : " Are you sure that there is nothing between Gerald Federan and any woman ? If there is any one you must have heard of her from his aunts."

She asked the question and smiled, and praised Jennie's long braids of hair while she spoke. But she went on to say that, from Federan's manner, she had gathered he was quite free.

" Could any man like such a mass of selfishness ?" he interrupted ; " but of course the least hint of our engagement to a jealous, morbid creature—so exacting, so domineering, so bent on having her own way—"

" But I have told her now."

" What did you tell her ?" said Federan, quickly.

" She asked me a question, and I saw no reason why I should lie about it any longer—even for your father's sake," she added, with a note of sarcasm. " I tried to tell her the day after you went away. I wish I had succeeded. You didn't write to me. I *couldn't* write to you. I saw letters addressed by you coming each morning. I told myself they were on business. I saw her answering them, tearing up copy after copy before she was satisfied. And still I wouldn't let myself doubt you. I have waited—waited a whole week in suspense—bewilderment—everything except complete distrust. I wouldn't believe that you could deceive me so. There seemed to be no motive. Was it because you wanted to flatter her into selling the property ? But she would have sold it without

flattery. If you were mercenary you would never have allowed yourself to care for me. . . . Nothing came right. Nothing was reasonable, and I couldn't believe her. But now—I know that she spoke the truth."

"I don't know what she told you," said Gerald, "but you know I don't care for her."

"I know nothing," said the girl. "I don't see why you spoke to me in the first place. I don't see why you asked me to marry you."

"If I hadn't asked you to marry me," said he, "I shouldn't have felt compelled to make something to live on! This is now, I think, the twentieth time I have tried to make that clear."

The humiliation of this discussion stung him to the quick. It meant the degradation of his love—the one beautiful and ideal passion of his existence; the one thing which had promised to come right and had given him, already, unforgettably tender hours. That he should now be saying such harsh things to the being whom, under all his anger, and egoism, and callousness, he still loved next to his own comfort, was a hard lesson in self-revelation.

"But I'll own," he added, "if you like, that I have been unwise."

"You see," said Jennie, with a bitter smile, "she asked me if we were engaged. You gave her the impression that we were not. As I told you, I didn't want to believe her."

"No one pays any attention to women's lies about men."

"What strange women you must have known !"

"I tell you," said Gerald, "I am not myself. If you care for me at all—"

He hesitated ; he had said that already so often, and, as he now despised himself for the appeal, he had not the courage to sustain it.

"The truth is," said Jennie, "that you have been playing with both of us."

"Make some allowance for a man at his wits' end."

"You saw she liked you. I can say that because I know you have a dread of appearing a coxcomb."

He winced.

"You saw she liked you," she continued, "and you encouraged it. I find her truthful. Naturally, she preferred to think that you loved her better, far better, than you ever loved me. She hasn't yet asked herself whether you could love anybody. Please, please, regard yourself as absolutely free. She is rich, after all, and you always say that money can buy ideals. I wish I could have helped you. I wish you could have seen life differently. I didn't love you with a common love ! Why didn't you let me go on ? I was so happy—so happy when you first spoke. Why didn't you let me go on thinking there was no one like you in the whole world ? Why did you destroy all that ?"

"I didn't want to destroy it," said Gerald, doggedly.

"All that is good in me is yours—eternally yours. Believe that or not, as you please. It's the truth."

"I know there's good in you," said Jennie. "Why don't you follow it? I won't talk about love. That is at an end between us. I am stunned and wounded. . . . I suppose I loved you because you were handsome, because you were willing to marry a poor girl. . . . Oh, because of a thousand things I thought I saw! But if I die—if it kills me—I'll cure myself of my mistake."

"Jennie!" said Gerald, going forward.

"No, no! I will never willingly see you again—never, never again!"

Stifling a sob, she went out. Gerald followed her to the top of the staircase, but on the landing she turned and faced him once more, and repeated, "I will never willingly see you again."

"That's nonsense!" he said; "you don't mean it."

Jennie glanced away from him, and said, with something that resembled flippancy although it was not: "You find it hard, perhaps, to believe that any woman can be in earnest."

Federan shrugged his shoulders. "Can one talk on the staircase?"

Jennie had again turned, and once more he followed her. But the Tredegars' carriage had driven up to the entrance, and he heard Mrs Tredegar's voice in the hall inquiring whether Mr Federan was disengaged.

Mrs Tredegar started violently at the sight of Jennie, and the girl, who was almost intoxicated by misery, explained her presence outside the office by saying that she had been obliged to consult Mr Federan on business. The older woman pursed up her lips.

“Rachel is very unwell this morning,” she said; “she has asked for you several times. I may be detained — so don’t wait for me. Take the train to Franton. Brooks will drive you to the station.”

The footman helped Jennie into the landau and she was hurried away over the cobble-stones, past the “Wheatsheaf” and the “Bugle,” the Grammar-School and the old church—all of which she saw as shadows on a flimsy sheet—for the world had grown unsubstantial to her sight, and its promises had turned to desolation and its brightness to the colour of tears. She no longer heard any dreamy melodies by the way, or dulcet voices calling out sweet passionate songs above the damp cold winds of the sea.

Mrs Tredegar, whose handsome face was strained and feverish, swept into Federan’s room, and would not accept his outstretched hand.

“We are not friends,” she said, “and I cannot pretend to like you. I have brought you a letter from my daughter, who is so ill that I am doing violence to my own pride in order to satisfy her whim. Read it. Afterwards I can have my say.”

The letter which she gave him ran as follows:—

“FRANTON MANOR.

“MY DEAR MR FEDERAN,—There seems to be some difficulty at the bank about that odious cheque. I am in no hurry over the matter, but when can you come to see me? I am reading Newman’s *Apologia* now. Too marvellous. What a study of a divided mind! Substitute two individuals for the two Churches, and you have every man’s difficulty—every woman’s problem.—Yours ever sincerely,

RACHEL TREDEGAR.

“I am supposed to be very ill. But I may talk to friends. If you come, don’t let us once refer to business.”

He was touched by the gentleness, which came so softly after the anguish of his scene with Jennie, and he thought, “Here’s true love.” The jealous mother, who watched his face changing while he read, could have snatched the paper from his hands.

“Do you think,” she said, abruptly, “that my daughter, with her health and her tastes, ought to have sold Franton? She likes the country in spite of her grumbling. No one could feel, moreover, that the sum your clients offered was at all adequate.”

“You see,” said Gerald, “it is just selling a man a thing he doesn’t want. Nobody wants that place. It is too out of the way. There is nothing special about the climate or scenery to attract speculators. There are no springs about; you couldn’t work it into a cure.”

"Yes, yes, it is quite true, but one never knows; the agricultural interest might come up again."

"Oh, never."

"Well, of course, I don't pretend to be a woman of business. I was anxious, and I had to satisfy myself."

"I take no responsibility. I couldn't advise Miss Tredegar. She complained a great deal about boredom and the expenses of the estate; I merely mentioned to her that I had a client who was prepared to give fifteen thousand pounds to relieve her of the white elephant. The rest was entirely for herself."

"Quite so. My daughter is legally her own mistress, and she has absolute control of the property. She is unfettered. . . ." She hesitated. "There is something else I want to say, Mr Federan. . . . You see my husband has been dead many years, and I am obliged to be both father and mother. . . . Now, I know what my husband would do in my place."

"What is that?" said Gerald, rather huskily.

"Well, it is difficult," answered Mrs Tredegar, "but he would say that you seem to have been paying my daughter certain attentions which go beyond mere business civilities. Am I wrong in thinking this?"

"No."

"You must be aware that I could not entirely approve of such a match?"

"I cannot follow any special objection. This is a case where even her own father couldn't do much either in the way of opposition or encouragement."

"I quite understand," said Mrs Tredegar. "At the same time, I don't wish to quarrel. I can't believe that any man could care for her. Her temper and her health are shattered."

"I don't agree with you. I think that she has been kept in the most unkind subjection—from the best motives, no doubt!"

"So that is your view?" This meant "So you declare war?"

"That is my view," said Gerald.

"Well," she sighed, "if you have it in your power to make my unfortunate daughter happy, I wish you well. But have you that power?"

"Surely, that is for her to decide."

"I may as well give in. I have no influence over my child—none! I can only hope for the best."

The carriage, of which she was so proud, had returned from the station; and she suffered intensely at the thought that Federan was quite aware that the horses and vehicle belonged to Rachel, that the respectful servants were in Rachel's pay, that she herself was a dependent on Rachel's bounty. She wished him good-bye, and this time he did not offer to shake hands, but as she was perverse, she held out her own, and covered her retreat by adding a smile of condescension.

It was difficult for Federan to trace the path and determine the scope of the plan in his mind, but such as it was he called it Fate, and in his despair he accepted it as the solution of his difficulties. It was paying the price, that was all. His love had been real; his hopes, God knew, had been natural; but luck had gone against him. He was neither inconstant nor dishonest, yet the unforeseen had forced him to seem both, and he did not feel that life could ever again be to him what it had been in the past."

"Still," he thought, "my business is with the world as it is, not as it might be."

Old Federan and the housekeeper, in the adjoining room, discussed the young man while the musical-box played. They agreed that he drew many troubles upon himself by his ideas.

"And they are foolish ideas," said his father, "and he has entered into a resolution of making his fortune by them. Don't answer me, for I can tell, by your face, what you are going to say. You think he's handsome, and you hope he'll marry money."

"There's more water glides by the mill than the miller knows," replied the woman, with the delight of country people in dark sayings, "and no one misses a thin slice from a cut loaf. You can take that as you like, sir. It may be that Mr Gerald has good hopes this time. Whenever you see two front teeth a little apart, you can be sure that means luck."

"This fool's talk of lucky teeth has been his ruin,"

exclaimed old Federan. "Lucky teeth and new moons have been all he's ever heard since he was born."

"What is to be, let be. I'd sooner have a space between my teeth than a coach and four," said the housekeeper.

CHAPTER XVI

“In old times the mason’s rule which was in use at Lesbos was not of wood or iron, but of lead, so as to allow of its adjustment to the uneven surface of the stone brought together for the work. This illustrates the nature of equity in contrast with law.”

NEWMAN.

THE journey by rail from Yafford to Franton lay through a rural district—hedged fields of barley and wheat, fields of heather and clover, fields of long grass and newly mown hay ranged in soft ridges ; the meadow land, with a shed here and there, or a large grey barn, or clumps of oaks and elms, had horses and cattle feeding on the pasture ; sheep grazed on the low hills, flocks of geese fed by the streams ; near Yafford there was a timber-yard well stacked with wood, and a coal-station. The little gardens of the red brick dwellings were full of scarlet runners, roses, wild orchids and fox-glove ; pigeons perched on many of the roofs, blackbirds strayed through the small orchards ; at Franton there were the long glass-houses of Mr Lux’s private nursery, vases of geraniums, young trees and shrubs. It was less romantic than the scenery near the coast, but it had

a soothing charm, the measured rhythm of quiet industries and humble lives. Jennie saw nothing. For ten days she had been suffering from a dumb jealousy and despair which she was too proud to analyse. She knew that Federan loved her—because a woman's secret instinct in such a case is never at fault; but she knew also, by another instinct as subtle and as infallible, that his love was not simple enough to be profound, and not pure enough to be strong under adversity. It was an emotional reckless appetite which owed its force—not to his own heart, but to her beauty. She had observed, with piercing misgivings, that he loved her best when she looked best, and already, in the first flush of their engagement, she had found herself dreading the time when she might no longer seem young or brilliant or vivacious. Just as the melodious verses, love songs, rich colour, sensuous music and the ideal in art gave Federan thrills of pleasure, the very words age and illness made him melancholy. Jennie laughed at his sensitiveness, affecting to think that it meant no more than the aversion of the vigorous animal for disease and debility. She had also seen him yield to the flattering fascination of Rachel's ways. When she tried to believe that all men were capable of many loves and many degrees of love, she remembered Harlowe's stubborn affection, which, so far from leading him into entanglements, kept him cold and scornful toward every other woman, no matter how

attractive, except herself. Why could not Federan show the same spirit? In one of his letters he had quoted Marvell's lines :—

“The love which us doth bind,
But fate so enviously debars,
Is the conjunction of the mind
And opposition of the stars.”

He acquiesced, she thought, too lightly in the opposition of the stars. Nevertheless, as a lover he was ardent, enthusiastic and devoted; while Harlowe in the same character was moody, bad-tempered, given to fault-finding and grudging of compliments. It was impossible to pretend that Harlowe possessed Federan's charm — which was the everlasting, amazing charm of sex undisciplined and defined. The girl, while she condemned his failings, saw that they were the classic faults of the hero in true epic. What of Odysseus? of Æneas? of Sigurd? of Tristan? of Lancelot? of Tom Jones? “Perhaps I'll die before I get old,” she thought; for hours this hope could keep her happy. And finding authority in romance for his potential infidelities, she had tried to excuse his business schemes by imagining that she understood them ill, or weighed them according to some fantastic code unfamiliar to minds engaged in commerce. He had talked about “playing the game”; he had insisted on his own sincerity of purpose; he had reproached her for admitting a doubt

of it; he had given her half a dozen justifications for every step taken in the affair. And yet . . . She did not enter into these arguments, but she did not love him the less because she could not enter into them. And yet . . . While the train followed its course through slumbering villages and farm lands, a sharp pain awoke in the girl's breast, and she grew weary of the skies. Little by little each word and look and gesture of the scene with Federan repeated itself in her memory, and as one gradually comes back to the roughness and loudness of life after an anæsthetic, the whole discussion—its significance, its brutality, its violent contradictions of all her dreams, and its irremediable bitterness—seemed to break her spirit. Tears like rain fell down her cheeks; she rocked to and fro—as she had once seen a peasant woman crying and rocking herself beside the dead body of a man. It seemed as though grief and all the emotions she had once thought sacred and individual took root in the very muscles, and had to obey some law in the great mechanism of the universe. Federan had felt the humiliation of a quarrel, she now felt the humiliation of suffering visibly the mental agitation which she wished to bear in silence and as a secret thing never to be disclosed. But when uncontrollable grief takes possession of a strong soul it comes almost as a child that must be indulged and compassionately treated; the Jennie that wept and swayed and moaned seemed a younger sister to the hidden heart-

broken Jennie who tried to wonder why tears had to be shed. At last her body grew obedient ; she dried her smarting eyes, and, when the train stopped at Franton, the strain of the sea and the strong breeze lifted her thoughts to the freer atmosphere of everlasting things. Perhaps her heartache was trivial, but it hurt. Perhaps her love story was a small matter, but if the world went on just the same in spite of it she could not. The everlasting things were for the old ; alas ! she wanted the ephemeral elusive gladness one snatched while young from flying hours and days.

Rachel's maid was waiting in the avenue which led to Franton Manor. She aped her mistress as well as she could, and she offered a perpetual caricature of Rachel ; her towzled hair was carefully disordered with the intention of following the *Récamier coiffure* ; she wore, without Rachel's grace, one of Rachel's dresses, dyed, but not altered ; she had caught some of the inflexions of Rachel's voice, and assimilated her vocabulary.

On catching sight of Jennie, for whom she was watching, she wrung her hands almost as elegantly as Rachel herself might have made the gesture.

"Oh, I am too alarmed ! Last night she was sad, but calm. And how quiet she was this morning ! I feared that quiet—for she has turned against her medicines and her massage ; she calls them cowardice, and she says she is paying for the poisons which her

ancestors for a hundred years drank, inhaled and injected under the skin. She is raging. The moment you had left the house—and someone was mad enough to tell her you had gone—she sent notes to Mrs Gillespie and Mrs Howland. Then she fell into a swoon—not one of her swoons, but a regular swoon!” Here, never having seen her model in circumstances of real earnestness, the maid became natural, threw her apron, a piece of frilled muslin, over her head, and wailed out in her native dialect at the top of her resonant voice, “Don’t say she’s going to die! I dreamed three nights of white horses! They say she’s ill enough to be prayed for. She must be dying if they pray for her in church. It’s the last thing they do, miss. And only yesterday she gave me that rich blue evening—all *passementerie*. Oh, those white horses! I’ll never forget them as long as I live. Their tails swept the ground, and the fair man in my dream who was driving them said, ‘They eat cake, bless you!’ It was all rubbish like that, and I woke up thinking, ‘I don’t like the looks of the fair man.’ I was bitter cold too!” She sobbed as she walked along with Jennie to the house, and said presently, after a violent shudder of unfeigned grief, “The *passementerie* is such a mass of beads that it will never dye black, or go with first mourning!”

Rachel meanwhile was in the rose garden, reclining on a bench by the pond in the centre where a stone Cupid, pouring water from a cornucopia into a blue-

tilled basin, sat astride on a stone dolphin. She loved the spot, for she had walked there on Federan's arm, and this association with him and with high and noble ideas rested like a caress on her memory. Mrs Gillespie, Mrs Howland, Mrs Bouverie-Copeland and Mrs Puddifant sat on chairs by her side. Their common-place appearance ruined the picture, and they seemed like actresses in ulsters rehearsing their words in some elaborate stage scene.

"You see how ill I am!" had been Rachel's greeting.

The four ladies had looked at her with curiosity, and exchanged glances which they hoped conveyed no shadow of their thoughts.

"I cannot recover. I have had a blow," she continued. "I don't wish to be hard on Miss Sussex, but I must put the case before you—in justice to my friend, Mr Federan."

Closing her eyes, she recited the little history, as she understood it, of a fortnight.

"And did Miss Sussex tell you that she was engaged to him?" said Mrs Gillespie.

"Yes."

Mrs Puddifant, after several entreaties and a good deal of coughing, referred to certain rumours which she was not ill-natured enough, she confessed, to particularise.

"Old Mr Federan has always been called respectable," said Mrs Howland, who looked like an elderly

unmarried, retired major. "I don't know much about the son. He called upon my husband about some project which he has in his head. The worst is that the colonel was taken with the idea, and he sold some securities in a very safe old thing, and is going to plunge on this new scheme."

"Every road leads to business—eternal business," murmured Rachel.

"I shouldn't get upset," suggested Mrs Puddifant.

Mrs Gillespie, who never flinched from her duty, mentioned the necessity of seeing life whole, as Matthew Arnold had so finely said.

Mrs Bouverie-Copeland, whose legal mind had prompted the judicious reservation of her opinion, now held forth.

"I do not care for Miss Sussex. When I was a girl I felt, thought and acted as all my young friends and relations thought, felt and acted. I hate people who are not like anybody else. Miss Sussex is a being apart. She has been allowed too much liberty. She might really be a married woman. This liberty is the great evil of the day. It is not confined to Miss Sussex, and I must say simply what I think right. Gerald Federan is a flirt, and by no means in a paltering way. He goes to great lengths. He leads girls on."

"He certainly leads girls on," said Mrs Howland.

"And few men actually propose in so many words," observed Mrs Gillespie.

On this point all four matrons were unanimous.

"A proposal in so many words," said Mrs Bouverie-Copeland, "is almost unknown."

"They have to put out feelers," said Mrs Gillespie, who had a masculine simplicity of phrase.

"A girl, therefore, may easily be led to understand that she has received an offer," said Mrs Bouverie-Copeland. "There is no position more painful to all parties concerned."

"Then you don't think Jennie lied to me?" said Rachel.

The ladies made faces till Mrs Puddifant owned boldly that she for one did not know what to think.

"Everything ends that way, too," exclaimed Rachel; "but you were all very kind to come."

Fruit and wine and cake were brought out to the visitors, and the conversation, on account of the footmen, was adroitly directed towards this question: "Do bread-crumbs make gold-fish burst?"

There were a few in the blue-tiled basin under the stone Cupid.

Jennie, in the library where Federan had first met Rachel, was talking to Dr Rench. The physician—an excellent man, but too healthy himself to have much insight into the maladies which spring from ideas—looked grave.

"Miss Tredegar's life hangs by a thread," he said. "The least shock, the smallest annoyance, will send the pendulum the wrong way."

The patient was to be kept cheerful; her melancholy fancies were to be discouraged.

"Everything must be bright," he went on, "but, mind you, it is most serious. I will not look in again this afternoon, as a second visit would excite her alarm. I suppose there is nothing on her mind." He dropped his voice, and talked into his hat. "She seems interested in young Federan. It would not be a bad thing in some ways. Her life is very blank, and, really, this district is no place for young people. A great many would say, 'She is lucky to get him,' and, upon my word, class distinctions are no longer what they were. If you bring up a girl in this lonely place till she is about seven-and-twenty"—he put up his hand—"ah, well, a word to the wise."

"And you say the least shock would be fatal?" asked Jennie.

"Quite fatal. But don't anticipate anything of the sort."

"What would be called a shock?"

"She is ill, she is sentimental, she is unreasonable. If she has set her affections on anyone, and she has any reason to think that the man cares for anyone else, or, as she is of an excessively jealous temperament (inherited, I fear)—*had* ever cared for anyone else—you will try to recollect that she is ill—seriously ill. A strain—and the whole thing will be at an end. Now, I'm not a croaker, as you know, but I speak plainly enough this time."

"I understand," said Jennie.

"For the life of me," added the good-natured man, who thought Jennie an exceedingly handsome, sensible young woman, "for the life of me, I cannot see so much to make a fuss about in Gerald Federan. These little tiffs and misunderstandings often mean no more than a determination to get one's own way. It isn't the man—it's the display of will-power." He pressed her hand, admired her fine complexion, said, "If I could prescribe that, what a fortune I'd make!" and went out thinking it a thousand pities that she had to endure the Tredegars' nonsense.

Jennie went with uncertain steps to her own room, and sat down on her bed. "It is certain. Gerald has deceived her. Everything is at an end now. There's no doubt. I must go away for ever from them both. It is hopeless."

Until that moment one hope had lingered in her soul, just as one swallow must always be the last to leave the changing trees. She had no longer any thoughts, but the sentence, "It is hopeless! hopeless! hopeless!" seemed to ring with a hundred voices through the walls, and she told herself that she wanted no other world elsewhere, no higher life, no joys incomparable to those she had already known for a short while; the silent grave for inert dust was best of all.

"When I am dead he will be sorry."

She remembered his protestations, his kisses, his

entreaties, and the passion in his brilliant eyes ; the emotion he could never wholly overcome even at the mention of her name. Rachel herself had declared but a few days before, "Mr Federan always blushes when one speaks of Jennie or he sees a bit of her handwriting."

Alas ! alas ! how little these signs might mean !

Then, with a revulsion of feeling, she felt she must live. "Can't I live without him ? I will forget him. Can't I pretend to forget him ? Oh, how unhappy I am !" A sudden wave of triumph fell upon her thoughts. "But he did these things for me. He wanted the money for me. His love for me made him dishonest. His love for me has been his ruin."

This was true enough to weep over, and true enough to be hailed as something undeniable in so much that was bewildering. He had loved her, he loved her still. Thus, for an hour, she suffered the most contradictory thoughts—which always returned as small pains shoot backwards and forwards from a constant greater one with increased torment, to the central warning : "It is hopeless ! hopeless ! hopeless !"

On Mrs Tredegar's return from Yafford, Rachel went with her from the garden to Jennie's bedroom. Tagg, the maid, and Lovelock, the housekeeper, followed, declaring that the stairs would be the death of their mistress. They ignored Mrs Tredegar,

whom they regarded with malice and distrust as a visitor who stayed too long. Did she pay them their wages?

"I am in the employ of Miss Tredegar!" said the housekeeper, invariably.

Rachel, on entering Jennie's room, walked painfully to the mirror on the dressing-table. "I look fifty years old!" she exclaimed, striking her reflection—but not too hard, because she thought it unlucky to break a looking-glass. Her eyes seemed to contain all the vitality left in her frame, and the ghastliness of her features made the fury which illuminated them the more forbidding.

"What was Rench saying to you about me?" she asked, fixing Jennie with a bitter smile which showed the disappointment, unavailing regret and despair of youth wearing away in purely selfish emotions. "He wants me to be happy. He talks about happiness as though it were something in a bottle." A cry broke in her throat. "Oh, Jennie, I did like you very much. I like you still, but you have not been all that you ought to have been. You told me an untruth. I know it is not true."

For an instant she had felt in her mind, which with many evil things, had also dreamed dreams of heroism and loyalties, that she was condemning herself to perpetual lies, self-deceptions and shame by her wild love for Federan. Still, why not? She would be, perhaps, his slave, his fool. The end did

not matter. He had given her what life itself had not given her—sweet joys and deep feelings which did not fail or pass. Her haggard countenance grew proud, she felt she was under a curse, for which she sought no pity and no relief.

“You told me you were engaged to Mr Federan,” she said. “One of you must be deceiving me. Were you trying to make me unhappy? Don’t you know that, whatever I think or whatever I do, I can never be at peace with myself? I’m doomed.”

“You say that so often!” exclaimed Mrs Tredegar, wearily. “You are too much alone.”

“And you say that so often,” replied her daughter. “I am always alone just because I’m doomed. But you never understand. Jennie understood a little. She has failed me now—utterly, utterly. Why,” she said suddenly—“why did you tell me such a lie about that man?”

Jennie looked at her eyes, which were encircled with dark lines; and she remembered Rensch’s fear.

“I was never engaged to Mr Federan,” said Jennie, looking steadily at the wan and miserable woman, “I told you a lie.”

This false confession produced at first a stupefying effect. Rachel’s instinct doubted it, but in the confusion of impulses the one she obeyed was the one which offered an explanation of Federan’s conduct. Her eyes grew kinder; they softened curiously as they met Jennie’s.

"But you like him," she insisted; "you wanted to take him from me—you wanted to separate us. You like him?"

"I loved him. He never loved me, and we were never engaged."

"There!" said Rachel, beginning to cry; "you hear her, mamma."

Mrs Tredegar, who saw, with violent irritation, the influence which Jennie still kept over her daughter, turned with almost serpentine vindictiveness towards them both.

"Do you believe her?" she said contemptuously. "I met her two hours ago coming out of Federan's office. I met her myself." Absorbed in the gratification of her own spite, she did not see the awful alteration in Rachel's face, and she mistook the alarm on Jennie's for the fear of being detected in deceit. "I met her myself," she continued, "and there must be something between them. Everyone says so. She has made this statement either to screen him or herself. I will say what I know. I will not be silent. There is some understanding between Jennie and that man. If she has ever lied she is lying now!"

"How could you meet her at his office?" asked Rachel, quickly. "Why were you there?"

The adroitness, the unexpectedness of this question, dismayed her mother.

"I went on business of my own," she stammered.

Rachel screamed out for Tagg.

"You are all in league against me—all of you! You all lie to me and deceive me! I have no one to trust in and no one to turn to. You all treat me as though I were a fool! I will believe no one! You are all liars—liars!"

She stumbled across the room, and fell, pressing her hand to her heart, in the corridor.

"You have killed her!" said Jennie. "Don't you know?"

"I know I am my wretched child's one friend."

But Rachel, at her mother's approach, screamed, "No one shall touch me . . . no one!"

She allowed Jennie, however, to place a cushion under her head.

The servants, in reply to the calls, ran to and fro suggesting remedies. Mrs Tredegar was inconsolable.

"If Rachel dies," she said to Tagg, "I shall never smile again." She implored Rachel to speak, but she would not. She remained on the floor, gasping, half-supported by Jennie's arms.

Mrs Tredegar then locked herself in her boudoir, and made a humble request:—

"When it is all over, please send someone to me."

No one answered her. But in the scullery far below, the kitchen-maid, who was a newcomer and never allowed upstairs to see the gentry, heard Mrs

Tredegar sobbing dreadfully, and as the sobs frightened her, and she was too young to remember that she would get full wages if the establishment were suddenly dispersed, and excellent mourning in any event, she ran away to her poor home, leaving her box behind.

CHAPTER XVII

“Think not my silence forgetfulness, or that my love is as dumb as my papers; though business may stop my hand, yet my heart, a much better member, is always with you.”

GEORGE HERBERT.

HARLOWE had entered upon the duties of his new appointment, and he was endeavouring to find that happiness in work which he had lost in love. So long as he remained engrossed by impersonal and professional matters he felt contented; but he began to dislike music and pictures, anything that was beautiful, anything which recalled his old thoughts or sentiments about the world. One morning, however, he asked himself, “Why am I writing so many tedious letters? Why am I holding so many long conversations with estimable persons who are also engaged, as I am, in killing time? I’d sooner work in a garden over dahlias and chrysanthemums.” This became his new dream. He read a book about New Zealand, and he promised himself a farm and fat cattle out there some time, before he grew too old. The bush was the place for a man. “The glades of glittering leaf-clouds and clear torrents and filmy ferns” (so he read)

called him, so he affected to believe. He would wander in the forest of Tane, rest under giant trees, work out the price of lumber and cultivate wheat. All these pleasures were for that some day which had become each year of his life still more indefinitely remote, and now, alas ! so easy to wait for. The hurry was over. But he formed an insincere practice of thinking quite earnestly, "Yes, please God, one of these days I shall settle in New Zealand." He thought it just as many good people speak of longing for Heaven—when the time comes for the realisation of that long-desired change, they will order prayers offered for its delay. They believe in the Heaven or they would not order the prayers, but there is in this, as in most hopes which have grown habitual at some expense to their intensity, an inadmissible preference for the craving rather than its appeasement. Jennie's letter asking for particulars of the Franton district roused Harlowe from this unsatisfactory state of mind. He began to fear that she was not happy after all, and, as his love was unselfish, he grieved. That Federan was involved in a dishonest speculation was no surprise to him ; it had been a certainty in his mind from the beginning, and it had been hard indeed to sit down in patience under such a presentiment. Jennie, driven forward by fate and circumstance and mad first love, had but a poor chance of drawing back in time ; she offered an example of the inutility of human effort, the powerlessness of ordinary

religious faith against the passion of instinct and the transports of imagination. Another man might have seen some opportunity for his own claim in the after days of the girl's disillusion ; Harlowe, too candid to be astute and too ignorant of women to know their possibilities for suffering and transition, had still something better to guide him than cunning or experience, and that was his own affection.

"If she did not love me before, she will not love me after her eyes are opened," he thought ; and having a store of little maxims which saved him many long soliloquies, he added, "'He complains wrongfully on the sea that twice suffers shipwreck.' She threw me over once. It would be my own fault if she threw me over a second time." But he resolved to put a brave face on his wounded pride ; a new protective tenderness stole over the love which had once been so reluctant in confessing itself, and so much too hard under rejection. Several hours were spent in composing the letter which contained the true copy of Paxton & Grainger's report. How should he tell the facts most gently ? How could he avoid the tone or semi-tone of the prophet proved faithful ? How might he, without offering excuses for Federan's conduct, best save poor Jennie from some, at least, of the mortification which she would, incurably, have to feel ? To excuse Federan was beyond his power ; to speak of him with impartiality was also impossible ; at last

he managed to write a letter in which Federan's name did not occur. After it was posted Harlowe attacked his day's labour with feverish energy. Another of his maxims—"Living well is the best revenge"—sustained him up to a certain point, but toward the evening, when he wandered on to the hillocks surrounding the town, and saw the fires of the great engineering works burning in the distance, their smoke lashing the peaceful summer sky, their chimneys rising like black impregnable pillars of some barrier between himself and the flowery world of nightingales, loves, delicious retreats and alluring insecurities—when he saw all this and heard the church bells chiming out monotonous hours for him, but perhaps ecstatic ones for other men, the New Zealand dream itself melted away in the cool and careless breeze, the maxims kept silent, and he rebelled against the loneliness of his lot.

That same night he took the express to London, and the next morning he left London for Franton.

"She is unhappy, and I can help her," he told himself. In the train he read ten newspapers, and as a consequence ten obituary notices of the same eminent statesman, lately deceased. He compared the facts, detected discrepancies, and felt that such an occupation was not merely diverting but instructive. When he thought he might safely glance at his watch, he saw that one hundred and fifteen minutes had been well numbed.

Encouraged, he bought at a junction several six-penny magazines and *The Mining Engineer*, the new number of which was just out.

"Here's luck!" he exclaimed, having determined to be moderate in all his desires. When he reached Franton late in the afternoon, he liked the look of everyone at the station—from the guard to the boy at the bookstall; he experienced some difficulty in choosing a flyman—they were all so obliging. He decided, eventually, in favour of the one, the least pleasant perhaps, who had first caught his eye.

"That is the fairest way."

Franton air seemed to possess remarkable qualities; the place itself was out of the way, the train service was abominable, and the local inns could not be recommended. But, apart from these drawbacks, Franton was well worth a visit. As the fly passed through the high iron gates of Franton Manor he heard the peacocks screaming, and he seemed to be entering a deserted domain. Not a leaf stirred; no butterfly, or moth, or bird or living thing could be seen; the unoccupied porter's lodge at the entrance was covered with red and yellow roses; the boughs of the trees in the orchard were heavy with apples: but he felt that the roses would fall at a touch, and the apples prove sour eating. His spirits grew depressed, and he drove along looking backwards over his shoulder in the direction of Miss Leddle's cottage.

Mrs Tredegar, exhausted by sobbing, was moan-

ing on her bed, when a servant, bearing Harlowe's card on a salver, came to her bedside. The gentleman had asked for Miss Sussex; Miss Sussex was waiting hand and foot on Miss Tredegar—she could see no one, and no one, on any pretence, except Dr Rench and Tagg, was admitted into the sick-room. What was to be done? Mrs Tredegar vaguely remembered Harlowe's name, and swift malice prompted her to make mischief without loss of time between this individual and Jennie. Realising that the traces of tears on her face would aid the eloquence of all she intended to say—she did not try to remove them, but descended as she was to the drawing-room. When she stood in the doorway of that apartment, Harlowe was immediately impressed, as she knew he could not fail to be, by her age, her stateliness, and the majestic candour of her grief. In subdued tones she told the young man as much as she knew, and more than she understood, of the situation in regard to Federan, and her daughter's most serious state. Harlowe was about to interrupt her with the assertion that, to his certain knowledge, Jennie and Federan were engaged to be married, when he remembered that the matter had been confided to him under the strictest promise of secrecy; but he maintained stoutly, in defence of his friend, that she was as incapable of telling a lie as she was of disturbing another woman's happiness.

Mrs Tredegar smiled in pity. "She is a dangerous girl—for men."

He was wholly unable to seize the real meaning of words in a certain order of ideas. He could make nothing of Mrs Tredegar's remark, but his whole being rose in anger. "I won't allow her to remain here another day," he said hastily; "no one could ever have one doubt of her."

Again he had to check himself. A friendless girl is thrice friendless when a man attempts her defence. Mrs Tredegar became indulgent and intelligent, if much colder in her manner.

"I knew your father," she said, and, shaking her head, sighed deeply.

The interview thus came to an end, and Harlowe left the Manor with a feeling that his call would be used against Jennie by her enemies, and converted into a compromising attention.

"I can do nothing for her—did I wish it ever so much. The one person who is able, and must be made to help, is Federan."

He ordered the flyman to drive to the local railway, and there he caught a train, after waiting two hours, for Cumbersborough. There were no trains to Yafford till the following day.

Gerald had replied to Rachel's note by telegram, saying that he would call at Franton, if she would see him, early on the morrow. No answer came to him,

and he passed a night of agony, realising that, by some means, he would have to raise fifteen thousand pounds within a week. His aunt might be persuaded to wait for her seven thousand; but when a man is penniless and without resources, a large sum which has to be found may be reduced by half and still remain a crushing liability. To add to his fears, Colonel Howland had sent a letter by express messenger to say that he must insist on *further details*. His wife, it seems, had been so perturbed by Rachel's story, that, while she did not attach the slightest importance to the love affair, she had the gravest apprehensions about the safety of Colonel Howland's investment. Had Federan not remembered tales of good tidings which came with the dawn, and legends of men who committed suicide when an hour's endurance would have brought them news of an unexpected legacy, he would have blown his brains out. If the two women at Franton were unhappy, he was in a far worse plight, for, in his case, remorse and despair were added to his sentimental misfortune, while disgrace and absolute ruin seemed, failing a miracle, his inevitable punishment. By the time Harlowe arrived another night was near at hand, and Federan was beginning to shudder at the prospect of a second encounter with his conscience, his forebodings, and his temptation to put an end to the whole thing quickly.

Harlowe was the first to speak. He stood in the

office and looked his successful rival straight in the eyes.

"We ought to know each other," he said; "Miss Sussex is a friend of mine. I don't think you can be aware that they are having a good deal of trouble at Franton. Miss Tredegar is dangerously ill—she's not expected to live."

Federan saw his hopes were overturned. "Is she dying?" he asked, after a dreadful pause.

"So her mother told me."

"I shall soon have more trouble than I can stand," exclaimed Federan, and his voice failed. "I have been deceived by Coolidge."

"That coal on the estate? I knew you were being taken in there. I couldn't suppose that you wished to take in other people."

"Speculation is speculation after all," said Gerald, with a sharp glance, "but I draw the line at a few things. I have been horribly deceived and let in."

"But Jennie mustn't be ruined."

"How do you mean—ruined? What has she to do with it?"

Harlowe answered him scornfully. "You must know. You have forced her to deny your engagement."

"The engagement is broken off."

"Thank God! I disapproved of you from the first. I didn't like you."

"That is frank."

"I wish to be frank. I disliked you. I felt that you were a man who couldn't be trusted. I call you weak. I call you cowardly. Do you know what the love of a good woman means? Do you think you can whistle to it, call it back at your pleasure or send it away? If so, I venture to say that you are greatly mistaken."

"I don't ask you to think well of me," said Federan; "but I ask you, for her sake, to try and make peace between us."

"For her sake!" exclaimed Harlowe. "You're pretty sure of yourself!"

"I am sure of her. She doesn't know yet all I have been through. When she hears the facts—"

"It isn't for her happiness to believe in you."

"It isn't for her happiness to doubt me."

"If I can induce her to put you, for ever, out of her mind," said Harlowe, "I shall do so. I can quite believe that you fascinated her, that you interested her, that you did everything in your power to make yourself indispensably agreeable to her. I can believe that she loved you, but that she could continue to love you after such conduct as this I doubt entirely."

"Your doubt is natural," said Federan; "any man in your position would entertain it. You see, perhaps, a chance for yourself."

"That is my affair. But I don't see a chance for a man who is a liar."

Federan shrugged his shoulders. "I excuse you

because things look black against me. I am prepared to make every reparation in my power."

"The reparation ought not to be necessary. I consider that your actions have been unpardonable. She couldn't respect you or trust you again. I'd sooner see her dead than reconciled with you."

"Then it's war to the knife, is it?" said Federan.

"There is no war and there are no knives so far as I am concerned. I'm a plain dealer, and I am telling you frankly what I think about you. And you are at perfect liberty to tell me, in return, what you think of me."

"Oh," said the other, "I'm not going to waste time on that. I haven't slept a wink for a week. I may as well tell you. Coolidge has bolted with the purchase-money—bungled the whole thing horribly. The manager at the bank got suspicious. Howland and that devil Lux were after me like hounds. I don't blame them—it was a swindle from A to Z! But I am as much fooled as they were; what is more I am utterly ruined, whereas they have merely lost, perhaps, some money. Do you expect me to play the Romeo with all this worry on my mind? What can I do?"

Harlowe had a sudden inspiration. "Would you go abroad if I could get you an opening?"

"I'd go anywhere." He went over to the horse-hair sofa and threw himself upon it. "I'm dead beat—just dead beat. On my honour I don't care what happens."

Harlowe, a soldier's son, could not forget that Federan, now so broken, so spiritless, so weary, had been a good fighter once. What blight had destroyed his manliness? how had he fallen to this mean disaster?

"I want her to forget me. I want her to be happy. But I can never again be happy," muttered Federan, and he turned his face to the wall.

Every man, sooner or later, has to utter his own epitaph. Harlowe's thin lips trembled, and he felt that Federan himself had justly ended the conversation. There was no more left to be said.

CHAPTER XVIII

“Away with all those vain pretences of making ourselves happy within ourselves, of feasting on our own thoughts, of being satisfied with the consciousness of well-doing, and of despising all assistance and all supplies from external objects. This is the voice of pride, not of nature.”

DAVID HUME.

FEDERAN remained where he had flung himself on the horsehair sofa, dizzy with heart-sickness. Want of sleep and fatigue had added physical illness to his misery; he seemed to be falling through the air to distant, yawning depths; the room seemed to be melting away, and the floor dissolving. He cursed his fate; he wanted to strike out at his adversaries. He would soon be known as Coolidge's tool, as a rascal, as a fraudulent trustee. What had become of his strength? Could he not show himself on the High Street at any moment, and be pointed out as young Federan, the best rider in the county, the winner of the Challenge Cup, the yeoman who had been given the Victoria Cross for heroic bravery in South Africa? No. The provincial townspeople cared nothing at all for glory unaccompanied by collateral securities. They would merely say that

they wondered how he could show his face, and all his achievements would give the cynical material only for the coarsest sarcasm—the sarcasm of men in petty ways of business who envied venomously, not fine reputations, but those who could even find any sums to steal or misappropriate. To see the colour of money showed to them a kind of unjust Providential favouritism. Imaginative minds, or minds warped by the perpetual striving in the meanest ways against the meanest difficulties, regard many temptations as a decided privilege—a distinction. Money gambled away on the Stock Exchange and the merry women of great cities, the credit given to well-known people and the opportunities squandered on those who appear to have already more than they can regard, fill the provincial heart, too often crushed, slighted and misunderstood, with a rage which is not always impotent. Federan had nothing to hope for from his neighbours and fellow-townsmen. He remembered an incident of disgraced prosperity in the case of the Marchmonts—county people—who, in consequence of unfortunate transactions in company promoting, had been obliged to leave, at short notice, the mansion which their ancestors had held for three centuries at Cumbersborough. Federan himself had been a boy of ten at the time, but he remembered the unfortunate Marchmonts being driven down the High Street by the third-rate jobmaster, who wore a shamefaced expression, to the Commercial Inn of

Yafford for a night's lodging. They had been refused, with excuses, accommodation at the "Wheatsheaf" and the "Bugle." Once they had spent three hundred pounds a week among the tradespeople of that very town.

"Ah, why didn't I stay out there!" exclaimed Federan, thinking of South Africa. But neither out there nor anywhere was any welcome waiting for a young man, ever so handsome, with an empty purse hanging by never more superb legs.

"It was not empty last year. I had something. I was respected." Then he cursed his sentimentality—his damnable, senseless, fatal sentimentality. What, in his sober moments, had he always maintained? Beauty cost so much; fastidiousness was a luxury; happiness, peace, the decencies were so expensive. Long after Harlowe had left the office Federan fancied he was still there answering his thoughts and reproaching him for his cowardice.

"I'm a coward. My God! I must be ill or going mad. I have never before been a coward. I'll pull myself together and astonish you yet. I've got the pluck of the very devil. Ask anybody you like. But pluck depends on one's health."

An unfamiliar rustle in the room made him turn from the wall.

"Who's that?" he called out, as a woman's figure advanced timidly, and took up a position at his feet. The twilight was dim that day; the scent of verbena,

which Rachel used, mingled with the musty odour of the deeds and parchments ; the dress, worn by the figure, suggested in some way a dress he knew.

"Rachel!" he exclaimed—"dear Rachel!"

"It's me, sir," said Tagg, with an infinite suavity, for she was much flattered. "Miss Tredegar has sent me to you. She's very ill, but she sends you her kindest regards, and hopes you will come to-morrow at any time."

"Here's love," he thought again, and, as his breast swelled, he felt it was impossible to help being fond of a girl who could show herself so generous. "A true woman," he sighed, burying his face in the hard, crocheted cover of the sofa cushion.

Tagg, in her confidential occupation of lady's-maid in the best families, had seen many men cry, and she knew how to conduct herself. She remained quiet and longed to get home in order to tell her mistress how Mr Federan was feeling the news of her illness. "He cried like a child," she intended to say ; or else, "Great sobs shook his frame,"—a phrase which she encountered frequently in the few novels she could tolerate. Neither phrase was an accurate description of the phenomenon, but she did not rate accuracy above style. During the silent but thrilling interruption caused by Federan's long silence, she decided finally on the "Great sobs shook his frame." His hands alone had moved, and both these were clenched. She thought, therefore, of adding—in order

to make her description wholly lifelike : " He threw up his strong arms." Tagg herself had never witnessed this gesture accompanied by weeping, but again her respect for tradition proved stronger than her own knowledge. The "strong arms" episode, therefore, could not possibly be omitted from her future narrative.

" You are quite sure that she is getting better ? " said Federan at last, rising.

" She was so afraid, sir, lest you should worry about the bulletin, that she sent me on purpose with a personal message."

Federan, with one hand in his pocket, was pacing the floor.

" No wonder ! What a fine, handsome man ! " thought Tagg ; and he was not unconscious of her reverential admiration.

When he drew his hand out of his pocket it contained two sovereigns for Tagg, which she accepted with the dignity of a queen receiving taxes. He had just been considering whether he could offer it ; in the dim light she looked so much like Rachel, and a few delicacies in judgment still tormented his unconquerable fastidiousness. The encouragement of Tagg's manner was overwhelming. He saw every one of his debts being paid ; the little house in Leicestershire assumed the dimensions of Franton Manor ; the impertinent doubts of Colonel Howland were already being dismissed with that curtness

which they merited so thoroughly. He rang the bell for the housekeeper, who came in with heavy steps. Port wine and cake were ordered for Miss Tagg. Miss Tagg was probably fatigued by the journey from Franton. Miss Tagg might like to hear the playing of the musical box—a curiosity in its way—while he wrote a letter.

Miss Tagg, after partaking of refreshment and noting that the housekeeper was a decent body for one in a small walk of life, made this observation: “What a magnificent specimen of manhood!” and jerked her thumb over her shoulder in the direction of Federan’s office.

Federan no sooner found himself alone than he closed his eyes and fell fast asleep in the arm-chair. An hour later the housekeeper was sent in to say that Miss Tagg would not inconvenience him for worlds—not for worlds—but she was afraid she would lose her train. He lifted his head, and tried to answer, but it seemed as though he would have had to sleep even if a regiment with fixed bayonets stood facing him. The housekeeper left the room on tiptoe, and beckoned to Tagg, who was outside. Tagg, with one finger on her lips, acted on the signal, and the two women stood over the young man, who had sunk again into a deep slumber. The elder of the two murmured a prayer for him; the younger coloured crimson, and sighed; they both reluctantly left him alone.

Tagg, on the landing, said, "That's more moving than any letter, I'm sure. I'll tell Miss Tredegar how pale and worn he looks. My word! I'm not surprised that the ladies are mad to get him. He's one in a lifetime."

All that night Rachel kept Tagg by her side describing again and again without variation the interview with Federan.

"How long did he cry? was he really crying? did you see his tears?"

"They glistened on his lashes even when he lay asleep," swore Tagg.

"Was he merely drowsy as men often are, or was it real exhaustion?"

"It was nature asserting itself," said Tagg; "the strongest must yield. It was a sleep like death!"

"Don't say death," said Rachel, whimpering. "What did he say when you gave him my message?"

"It seemed as though he couldn't take it in all at once, but at last he said, in his masterful way, 'Are you sure she is better?'"

"Yes, his way is masterful," said Rachel, who wished to think so; "many would call him arrogant. This makes him enemies. He is never arrogant with me. But was he really crying, Tagg? You are quite sure?"

And so on, all over again once more. Tagg described the colour of the tie he wore, his boots, the

pattern of his trousers, the links in his cuffs. Would his hair be called brown or dark brown? would his eyes be considered his finest feature? But what a nose! Like a statue's. And his figure!

"I have seen some figures," said Tagg; "there was Captain Trevelyan, that Lady Montfort ran away with—a very fine man. But Mr Federan would beat him any day."

"What else did he say when you gave him my message?"

The unwearied faithful Tagg yawned, but began afresh: "He threw up his strong arms, and great sobs shook his frame."

"I can't believe it."

"If it was the last words I uttered!"

"I thought men never cried."

"They all cry—but not before each other if they can help it, or unless they know it's a true friend."

Thus it went on from the rise of the moon till pallid dawn—the eager questions from the feeble, and the drowsy answers from the vigorous, voice. Jennie, who was trying to sleep in the dressing-room, heard the strange murmuring duet, but she could not catch what was said. Once she went in and implored Rachel to rest.

"I am having a good night," said Rachel, strangely; "for once it is pleasant to lie awake."

She asked for another pillow—a blue satin one, and, propped up on many cushions because of her beating

heart, she fell into a long reverie, watched the shadows cast on the ceiling by the play of the night light, heard the fluttering of the silk curtains against the open window, and composed the things she would say to Federan when they met. What if she found any preoccupation in his eyes—the desire that was not for her? What if he tried to excuse himself? She had made far better excuses for him than he could ever offer. She would entreat him only to keep silent while she, always smiling, spoke his defence. What had he done? Here she refused to think, lest the vile details of legal business should disturb the supreme, ineffable languor in her soul, or the rush of her troubled senses toward a fuller life. And each time a pang of jealousy made her wince, she tried to soothe the pain as a mother soothes a suffering child—as though it were not her own suffering, but something harder to bear; and each time a suspicion of Federan's honesty broke through her dream she put out her hands, and, affecting to play, added their shadow to those already on the ceiling. Tagg, opening her eyes once, and observing this fantastic movement of the dancing figures among the still ones over her head, was terrified; she thought of spirits and bad signs. But for the supernatural, as she imagined it, she had no courage, so she covered her head with a sheet and said, with many mistakes, the Lord's Prayer backwards till she fell asleep again.

Federan walked up the avenue the next morning asking himself, "What shall I say? how shall I begin?" But he studied the trees and shrubs and plants with new interest, and thought that the raptures of the spring and the treasures of the autumn could be enjoyed to perfection at Franton. How one changed! The continual flux and revolution of one's ideas led to unexpected developments. He rang the house-bell nervously, but he saw, by old Drover's face, that he was welcome. As he mounted the staircase he beheld himself reflected at full length in one of the old French mirrors. The effect was almost as though his own portrait, by a modern master, had been added to those of the Tredegars in the gallery. When he reached the door of Rachel's room his heart began to beat heavily, and he wished he had not come. But she was his last hope, and he blamed himself for his ingratitude.

She was lying on a couch; a white scarf was bound, in the classic style, around her head; her hands were folded, and her limbs stretched out as though she were a piece of marble carved into a tombstone. She had colour in her cheeks and lips, a red rose in her bosom; she smiled when Federan came in.

"Your illness hasn't changed you," he said. He wanted to add that she looked younger, which was a fact; he gazed at her instead with an admiration which she, at least, had never seen in his eyes before.

She hastened to speak—lest he should utter jarring

or imprudent or self-condemnatory words. "They tell me I need solitude and repose," she said, "but I have had both so long."

She explained her views of solitude ; how it made every necessary contact with strangers and the world outside more and more difficult ; how one preyed upon one's own spirit ; how one lost all sense of proportion.

He became very pale, and, drawing his chair nearer to her side, took one of her hands. "But why have you been ill?" he asked. "I am afraid it is all worry." Then, because he found sympathy in her smile, he told his story : "I was never born for business and money-making. My own wants are so simple. Give me a horse and fresh air—I'll sleep under hedges and eat hips and haws, rabbits, anything. There is no squalor in the open. What I hate, what oppresses me, are the small rooms, the odour of a kitchen, household drudgery and the economies. Take the life at my aunt's cottage. They do everything decently, yet one hears too much sweeping, dusting and bustling ; as you eat one course you smell the next ; that is not roughing it—that is gentility. Gentility is unendurable."

She agreed, and, in order to divert him, asked questions about his life in South Africa during the war.

"Ah, that was a man's life!" he answered, "You did as you were bid ; there was camp routine : you

shot others, and were shot at; you took care of your horse. I wish now I had stayed there."

Her fingers grasped his more tightly; "Did you like it so much?"

"Better than respectable poverty here, infinitely better than robbing my neighbour." He pointed out the essential dishonesty in all commercial dealings. "Men of the highest integrity commit themselves to things in business which in private affairs would fill them with shame. A chivalrous sense of honour and astuteness in business are irreconcilable terms. The first principle of trading is to buy as cheaply, and to sell as dearly, as possible. The seller is defrauded and the buyer is swindled. Rents are too high, wages are too low. The struggling industrious man cannot get a small loan to save him from ruin, whereas the rich thief can get vast sums at any time."

This bitter prelude fatigued the girl, who cared, and knew, nothing about business. She wished to discuss her emotions.

"You must leave all this," she said softly.

"Ah, but how? At this instant I am a ruined man. A friend"—he referred to Harlowe—"has offered me a berth in the Colonies. I was tempted to go. But your message came, and I am here."

Rachel trembled. She implored him not to explain; she understood enough already, and, as she said this, she drew from under her pillow a sealed envelope

which contained the dishonoured cheque. "It is there," she said, and looked away.

Federan, with deliberation, tore it in small pieces, put them in the grate, struck a match and set fire to the heap, which he watched consume away into flaky ashes.

"I'm glad it is destroyed," he said, "but I cannot burn the loss which it represents. That must be made good somehow."

She raised herself on her elbow, and stared at him. "What way occurred to you first?"

"There are not many ways open to one," he answered; "we needn't discuss them."

Then he walked back to her and said, simply enough, "Think what you will of me. I was tempted, and I fell. Other men would not have called the matter a temptation—they would have called it a legitimate speculation. I can but say that to me it seemed horrible. This will show you that I acted against my conscience; I knew better. I am worse, therefore, than Coolidge."

He would not hear a word murmured in condemnation of Coolidge; and Rachel, who seemed fretful under this restraint, secretly admired his loyalty to a scoundrel whom he had loved as a brother.

"Coolidge lost his soul when he married," said Federan; "here, I know all, and therefore I pardon all."

"I can give you the money," exclaimed Rachel; "what is money to me? What has it done for me?"

"I shall never forget your kindness. But I cannot take money from a woman."

"Call it borrowing," she suggested.

He shook his head.

"Why am I not a man?" she cried, bursting into tears. "You would take it from a man. I meant to be a friend to you; whereas, I see, I have hurt your feelings. But why be so proud? I am not proud—at least, with you."

"Ah, be reasonable. Fifteen thousand pounds—how could I accept it, even as a loan?"

"If I lent it, on a mortgage, to an utter stranger, it would be called a good investment. Why, then, can't I lend it to you?"

"I have no securities to offer." He took both her hands. "It is impossible. You humiliate me by pressing the point."

She felt, by this very admission, that they had already become closely intimate.

"I will press the point," she answered; "at any risk—because I am right."

Suddenly, she began to wonder whether he had ever taken Jennie's hands, or kissed them, and a deep flush of jealousy swept over her face.

"My hands are not so pretty as Jennie's—are they?" For the first time that day she studied his expression, and she saw that he did not seem well or happy, but, on the contrary, aged, care-worn and wretched.

"Another day," he said huskily, "I'll talk about Jennie."

"No! No! I'll never speak her name again. You were a little in love with her—I know it."

He could bear it no longer. "I have deceived you there, too. We were engaged. She has broken it off now; but we were engaged."

Rachel snatched back her hands, and pressed them both to her heart. This was her chronic gesture—the one she made unconsciously.

"I wish," she said, with a distorted face, "that you had kept on lying about it."

This jealous agitation about a girl seemed to him miserable in contrast with his money troubles.

CHAPTER XIX

“Why was not I born in that golden age
When gold yet was not known?”

DRUMMOND.

THE first strangeness of the interview with Rachel had worn away, and Federan, during a pause, looked round the room. Old prints in ebony and gold frames, and strips of Florentine embroidery, were hung on the green walls. The furniture, covered with chintz, was simple; there were piles of finely-bound books on the tables, and arranged on shelves; the air took its outdoor fragrance from bowls of roses, vases of carnations, and small orange trees in wooden tubs. Below the wide windows a stone terrace led to a flower-garden, and beyond that there were yew-trees curiously cut, clumps of oaks, beech, and spreading cedars, a landscape of fields outlined by low hedges, and at last a ridge of hills. Rain-clouds were gathering in the sky, and the wind howling down the chimney had an echo of the sea beating on the beach. Federan, who, an hour before, had doubted his star, and seen himself disowned and disinherited, denied by his friends, expelled from his

club, and persecuted in his native town, came to the conclusion that he was pardoned, adored and indispensable : he accepted this as certain, and he determined to act upon the certainty of it. Evidences in Rachel, minute but abundant, delicate but effective, had united to bring him to this belief ; he, in return, was soothed by her silky charm, which emanated partly from her dress and partly from her manner. He thought, "I won't deceive her any more, or ever again. I will tell her the truth. Treachery kills a woman's love, while jealousy will keep it burning. When men lie to women who love them, they are fools."

He asked, "Will it disturb you if I walk about ? I want to tell you many things."

"This room is a woman's room," said Rachel, blushing faintly : "it must seem like a cage or a cell to you. Please walk about."

He stood up, threw back his head, expanded his chest, and, with one hand in his pocket, paced the floor just as he had paced his own office for the admiration of Tagg. Rachel wished he were less handsome, in order that she might prove the spirituality of her affection.

"It is very easy," said Federan, clearing his throat, "to attach too much importance to love affairs. In every vow we make there is a secret note of perjury and we can be absolutely certain of our hopes only—because we live more earnestly in the life we imagine

than in the life we lead. We always know that the life we have must change, whereas we believe our hopes will never change. At least, that has been my idea."

Rachel listened with her eyes half-closed and her lips parted in a smile. Federan's candour and impulsiveness offered two permanent provocations to women: the one by its defiance of their sentimentality, the other by its mastery over their sense. His cynicism made the girl's heart as pale as her face; but she forgot his philosophy and her own when, halting abruptly to clasp her hand, he said between his wise reflections, "How can I talk sensibly—as I must—if you have such long eyelashes?"

Making the most of her eyelashes and his softer mood, she whispered, "You'll take that money?"

"My dear, you ask impossibilities."

The sweetness of this "My dear" made her deaf to the rest of his speech. It entered her mind as some lovely phrase of music, and sank into her heart, while he continued the exposition of his views. "But the hopes change too. Obstinacy or vanity often force us to pretend that they remain. I am not dreaming of denying constancy—isn't constancy the main cause of our dismay when we find our soul undergoing some subtle, irresistible, even unwelcome development? 'If man were constant, he were perfect,' is a false saying. If man were strictly constant, he would be dead. I'm tiring you, but I want you to know me, and understand me."

"I do—without your telling me a word."

"No—no ! Every woman will have it that she can read any friend 'like a book.' Men are lazy and allow the delusion to pass. I won't. And my egoism would be inexcusable if—"

He stopped short, and his face grew haggard again ; the steely lines which had been slowly forming for several weeks showed plainly.

"My egoism," he repeated, "would be inexcusable in any ordinary friendship. But what you might call your understanding of me would be too flattering. I need, at this moment, not kindness, not pity—but condemnation. By condemning me you will save me. By finding me doubled-tongued and unreliable you may help me to be sincere."

The prudence which is always ingrained in the true burgess and middle-classes was still strong enough in Federan to dictate the only possible terms of his redemption. As a child he had read each morning the following lines, illuminated, framed and hung over the mantelpiece of his nursery :—

"We must to virtue for our guide resort,
Or we shall shipwreck in our safest port."

He felt secure with Rachel, but where a man of more luxurious education would have been satisfied to have his faults, for the moment, obscured by her fancy, and his punishment, also for the moment, annulled by her fortune, his inherited instincts warned him that,

unless her devotion rested on an actual knowledge of his affairs, she, too, would in the end repudiate him—if not openly by her actions, at least secretly by her scorn. Finally, he knew, as a lawyer, the common error of those in the wrong, who, seeking advice, conceal the very facts which are injurious to their case and alter its whole complexion.

“You must know,” he insisted; and although she winced painfully every time Jennie’s name was uttered, and although the fire of life which had burnt so brilliantly in her eyes died out, giving place to a weary sadness and distrust, he told the story of his engagement, adding the smallest details and his most intimate thoughts.

“You love her still,” said Rachel, at the end, in a veiled voice; “I can see you do.”

“Not in the old way.”

“That’s only because you are worried. If you were happy, it would soon be in the old way again.”

“I think you are wrong. But I won’t make foolish protestations. You wouldn’t believe them.”

“I don’t see why you should be so suddenly precise and conscientious,” she said; “it bewilders me, and I hate it. You were nicer when you were not sincere.”

“Formerly I tried to please you. Now I’m not trying to please you: I am merely trying to speak the truth.”

"You want to ease your own mind, and you don't care what I think of you."

"I care so much that I will not have your good or bad opinion of me depend on any illusions."

"I don't care how many illusions you have about me," she said with petulance; and she thought of the rouge on her cheeks and lips, the artificiality of her movements, her talk, and her ideas; the unreality of every one of her feelings—except the passion for him. But this one genuine emotion was, without her knowledge, purifying, simplifying, chastening her whole nature. She wondered, "Do I want him to be happy, or do I want him for myself?" and she hoped that he would soon take her hand again.

"You are too clever for the provinces," she said; "you have no outlet for your ability—no opportunities. I want you to take some position in London. Have you ever thought about politics? My relations have a little influence."

"I have never thought of anything except how best to be idle and contented."

She could scarcely restrain her tears.

"This new candour of yours is another name for selfishness. It hurts me—yet you keep it up because you want to be natural."

"Why should it hurt you to know me in my true colours?"

"I want to be your friend."

"You are my one, my dearest friend."

This assertion, from a man who has just proved himself truthful to the point of barbarity, had more effect on the girl than many hours of honied love-making. Her eyes, which had been as dull as extinguished lights, seemed to catch fire again: they blazed, and softened, and blazed once more when they met his.

"All the same," she said, for fear of betraying herself, "I do not intend to fall in love with you. Your candour is catching."

This stroke, in its way, was as good as his own; it wounded his vanity, but roused his admiration for her spirit.

"I have learnt," he said, "that your friendship is better than the deepest love of any other woman. I haven't dared to think what your love would be."

Thus he slipped back into the old, easy, seductive insincerity. But she was acquiring a taste, under his influence, for downrightness, no matter how crude, and her discernment was now prompt in rejecting mere rhetoric.

"That's all ball-room talk," she answered; "stage talk, book talk, any talk except heaven and hell talk—the two places where everybody has to drop pretences."

"When I marry, I want the talk to be just the thing you describe—heaven and hell talk."

"When you marry!" she exclaimed, lifting

herself on her elbows, and turning on her side. The marble pose was therefore lost.

"Yes. You may think it strange that I speak of marriage when you have just said that you cannot love me and I have just told you that I am ruined. But it's a better, more sacred, more hopeful beginning than those conventional lies which people often tell each other when they are contemplating marriage. There is a reckless, self-seeking love—"

"The love I long for," she thought, with a cutting sigh. Yet, not to discourage him, she said exquisitely, "That selfish love of which you speak has its beauty. Don't let either of us blame it, because we are only able to offer each other friendship."

"I can't swear that I do not love you!" said Federan; "I was immensely attracted to you—from the first. The attraction was so strong that it seemed, then, a sort of disloyalty to Jennie."

Since Rachel had told him that she did not intend to love him, the problem of wooing her had solved itself. He could now plead his own cause, and, without seeming to take advantage of an affection which he could not in the circumstances pretend to requite fully, he was able to assume, for argument's sake, that the case demanded entreaties on his part, and bare tolerance on hers. The tone he used was the tone of one who, conscious of a certain worth, begs to be tolerated. He saw no hope, but . . .

He had no position, no future, but . . . He had led a life of which he was now ashamed, but . . . And he was not one to surrender easily. One had to work out one's own salvation. What had Browning written? here, he quoted Browning:—

“Saul, the failure, the ruin he seems now,—I bid him
awake
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find
himself set
Clear and safe in new light and new life, a new harmony
yet
To be run, and continued, and ended—who knows?—
or endure!”

Why, he asked, try to say and think badly what great poets have thought and said with incomparable clearness, for us?

As a piece of architecture will assimilate, by weathering, to the visible quality of rock and cliff surrounding it, and so become a natural feature of its landscape, a man's constant reading will transmute and colour his ideals although it may not govern his actions. For this reason the charge of hypocrisy, or *of a want of humour*, is inconsiderately made against those who are, by confession, great lovers of noble poetry, and, by their deeds, disreputable or mean. But, to continue the comparison, however much a piece of architecture may grow, by the effect of climate, to resemble exteriorly what it is not, it will be found, on close examination, a faithful tribute to its first vulgar or beautiful design. The design

remains ; and a man's inherited nature remains—a thing apart from his soul, which, suffering all the shudderings and quiverings of flight, is often bound immovably to some disabled intelligence. Federan was too self-conscious not to see the misapplication of fine sentiments to his particular case.

“The eternal Pecksniff in man !” he exclaimed suddenly, “and especially in me !”

But the quotation had already offered Rachel an inexhaustible source of hopes : she grew more and more quiet, more and more gentle, graciously sad and wordless—but for the soft exclamation, “I know ! I know !” which she murmured from time to time during his narrative.

He found this dulcet, kind companionship so endearing, that, just as she had wished he were less handsome, he, for the same reason, and with equal honesty, forgetting, for a redeeming instant, his own necessities, wished that she were poor. And he now felt convinced that although Jennie and he had seemed designed for each other's admiration, enjoyment, and passionate love, they were inimical in spirit : neither of them had any bent for the bearing of the other's burdens, or any mercy for each other's shortcomings. The man Jennie had imagined him to be needed no compassion, and the woman he had seen in her had nothing homely, except the virtue of obedience. It had all been a mistake ; its memory—it had not yet become a memory only—would be a physical ache,

and its result, a perpetual regret that what had promised so much had failed so utterly, ended so soon. He wanted to tell Rachel this, but his feelings on that subject were still inexplicable in speech. She knew, however, by instinct, that, much as he felt the business difficulties, he had received worse blows, which no wealth could ease, in Jennie's contempt and the treachery of Coolidge. She had many false, many insecure notions of life, but she had never committed the vulgar error of over-estimating the power of money. In order, therefore, to share his secret trouble and identify herself more closely with his thoughts, she composed a story about a deep love she had once had, and lost.

"Once, years ago, there was some one," she began : "I met him in Paris. He was an author, and I longed to join him in a garret—as much as possible like the lodgings of Des Grieux, or Werther, at the Opéra Comique ! That was indeed 'a dream in the dawn of life—a shadow before its noon.' On my side there was real love, on his there may have been love also ; but whenever he left me, it always seemed as though our conversation together had consisted of enigmas and reticences. We were never natural. I thought that did not matter : hour after hour, day after day, night after night I comforted myself by thinking, 'Surely we must understand each other if we love each other.' Each time we met we drifted further apart."

Federan felt a pang of jealousy, but, as the history had so much in common with his own, he was fascinated, and watched her face with delight.

"We parted at last," she continued. "You cannot imagine—I cannot tell you—how much I suffered in coming to that resolution. Afterwards, I suffered still greater grief in regretting the estrangement I had made irreparable. It was a vision, a deception, but I wanted it back again. If I could have called it back at will, there were many, many times when I would have done so.

‘When the lute is broken,
Sweet tones are remembered not’

was not the case with me. I remembered the sweet notes too well. I could not forget them because they were unreturning."

She gazed past him; but although she conveyed, with art, the idea of a woman mourning over some hope for ever dead, Federan was made to feel that the sorrow had its recompense in the lulling sympathy she was able, through knowledge, to offer him at that moment.

"You see," she said presently, "we have both had our troubles."

The sentimentality of her invention and the pathos of her manner touched him, just as sentimental and pathetic scenes on the stage brought quick tears to his eyes. She had told her story consummately well because she had thought of him only while she told it.

"Where is the man now?" he asked, suddenly betraying the provincial intonation and inquisitiveness which she had called, in discussions with Jennie, *très paysan*.

"The man!" she stammered taken by surprise; "oh, the actual man doesn't matter. It was the vision that mattered."

Federan decided at once that he had no dangerous rival to strive against, and his curiosity died out. "A girl's love affair," he told himself, "the simple love which tests the heart without satisfying it—the love which the French call *l'amour d'essai*. It schools a nature for the fuller, deeper, true love."

"You must not tire yourself," he said aloud.

"I am not tired. I feel quite well," she answered, astonished at her own happiness and abandoning herself to a new dream.

Federan, too, was tranquil, and he now noticed the subjects of the engravings on the walls. Till then he had merely seen the frames. No man could presage his future from his present, he knew, but he felt a security of mind he had never before known. He thought, "I am exceedingly fond of this girl. I am devoted to her. I would rather be shot than deceive her. This is the best feeling I have ever had about any woman."

The pauses in their conversation became frequent and a little oppressive. Following the simplicity of his instincts, he stooped during one of the pauses, and

kissed her cheek. No man had ever kissed her before ; and as her ideas grew coherent, she reflected, "I know now why common couples who kiss but never talk don't quarrel."

But she asked Federan, "Do you think it was quite nice of you to have done that ?"

"Really," said he, with good-humour, "you are a child."

An outward primness in women appealed irresistibly to his taste. Jennie had always been a touch too spontaneous. When he rose to leave, kisses were not merely given, but, with dove-like gentleness, exchanged.

Before he left the Manor, he went into the library and wrote Rachel a letter in which he asked her to marry him. Drover, wise-eyed, carried the missive, heavily sealed, up the staircase while Federan sauntered down the avenue toward the town. There was a steeplechase on the morrow, and he was glad that he had not, in a fit of despondency, withdrawn his name from the list of riders. His strength had returned, and at the prospect of a wild race over obstacles and dangers his blood tingled.

"I shall win," he exclaimed ; "and that will please her."

Rachel, who would have enjoyed a long meditation on her love, was despatching a dry but imperative communication to Federan's bankers ; Tagg was ordered to take the note and deliver it personally.

Tagg suspected that money was being parted with, and she became rueful, long in the face, and taciturn.

"Right is right," she kept murmuring, with irritating monotony.

"What's the matter, Tagg?" asked Rachel.

Tagg, subdued, replied that Mr Federan's name had been entered for the steeplechase at Wedders-town. She had seen the list in the local paper.

"He's a superb rider," said Rachel — "quite superb."

"Could you see him taking the water-jumps?" asked Tagg, morbidly.

Rachel shuddered, grew pale, and covered her face. "I couldn't watch him. But I want him to ride," she said.

"His daring is awful," said Tagg.

"It terrifies me," said Rachel, glowing with pride. "If I opposed him, Tagg, he would be ten thousand times more reckless. I dare not say a word. You may have that mauve silk jacket; I'm tired of it."

Tagg, taking the cue, and mentally designing many alternative uses for the jacket, said, while Rachel sealed the letter for the bankers, "Come what will, he's a magnificent specimen of manhood." Then she dropped into her dialect,—

"'Them as have had happiness have nought to look forward to,' as my poor mother used to say. 'Tis sure un can't have it past and future as well. All your happiness, miss, is to come."

CHAPTER XX

“Forget the dead, the past? O yet
There are ghosts that may take revenge for it.”
SHELLEY.

JENNIE, during the first part of Federan's visit, had been in the library on the storey below Rachel's boudoir; but the sound overhead of the once-loved voice talking in confidential tones to another woman was more than she could bear. She ran out of the house to the woods, and wandered through them a prey to jealousy—wringing her hands, biting her lips and longing for the relief of tears. Near the pheasant preserves, where she often walked in order to feed the birds and talk to them, there were dead rats, weasels, stoats, jays, magpies, cats, mice and rabbits hanging on a long string as warnings to other vermin.

“How like Bluebeard's wives!” she thought, “and all foolish creatures. Why doesn't my heart break or turn to bronze? How can I live unless it changes?”

She felt it must be breaking, and began to weep with such violence that all the pheasants hid themselves and the wood grew silent. Her thoughts,

wandering and confused, returned invariably to the same subjects—the deceitfulness of human hopes, the treachery in love, the misery of disappointment; while the dreams and phantoms of her soul rose before her. They had been so beautiful, so joyous: now, indeed, they were the very ghosts of ghosts. Still, one had always the sky and trees. She looked at the sky and the trees. Alas! they could not make her happy: they were not enough; they made her loneliness more agonising. She made her way at last, by the gamekeeper's cottage and garden, to the high road, and walked, drooping, stumbling, graceless, in the direction of Cumbersborough.

At the end of the first mile she met Harlowe, but she greeted him without surprise. An expression of unaccustomed hardness had settled on her pale, strained features, and she seemed to him changed almost past recognition.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed. "You look so ill—as though you were hunted."

There were walls of rough stone on each side of the road, which ran, at that point, below the level of the fields, which rose upward to the hills on one side, and on the other declined toward the beach and the sea.

"Let us climb up there and sit down," said Harlowe: "I'll help you. You walk too much. You'll kill yourself."

She half smiled and half trembled. "I shall never

give in till I die. I can hold my head up: no one shall know that my spirit has gone. But the pain is here—always here.”

She pressed her heart, and he felt that she scarcely saw him—she was so absorbed in her own despair. They found a seat on the trunk of a large maple which had been blown down during the gales of the early summer. A thin white veil of clouds covered the sky, and the sea, which had lost its movement, seemed to mingle its silvery fluid with the vapours of the horizon. The sweetness, the solitude, the peace and gentle melancholy of the scene were delicious to Harlowe.

“We can be happy and quiet here,” he said.

She longed to press her throbbing temples against the jagged cliff behind them. The long white winding road below seemed to lead to some impassable gulf; the spire of the parish church of Franton seemed to recede into an infinite distance.

“I told a lie to save someone else,” she said. “I ought not to have done it, because no one can be saved by telling lies. I have nearly killed myself, and I have helped no one.”

Then she recalled vividly the wooing sound of Federan’s voice talking to Rachel in the room over the library.

“That is not quite true, either,” she added: “Rachel is another woman. But I wanted to save Gerald too, because I loved him, John. Once I did

love him. He was weak—that was his fault ; and I was hard. I wasn't kind. I said things no man could forgive. I have driven him to her."

"A man can't be driven to a woman he doesn't like," said Harlowe, with more honesty than tact.

"Haven't I told you he is weak?"

"Then you don't want him. You would despise him."

"I told him I would never willingly see him again. But for weeks I loved him ; I have only despised him for a few days. I keep remembering the love and forgetting the hate."

"You want me to make excuses for him, but that I cannot and I will not do. One must either count for something or nothing in this world. One must be able to take a stand, if need be, alone."

"And I'll get over my trouble alone," she said hotly. "I feel bruised and beaten and blind. You can't help me ; no one can help me. For a short time, while Gerald and I loved each other, I was under a spell. Nothing seemed able to hurt me, and nothing, I thought, could hurt him. But the woman I was three weeks ago is dead." Her spirit cried out again in self-reproach, "I might have been kinder to him. We parted cruelly. If we hadn't parted cruelly!"

"You can't prove an argument in the face of facts," said Harlowe ; "all the blame is on his side.

But I might go on for hours—I'd have nothing to show for my labour and pains."

The inutility of his own affection made it seem, to his practical mind, a kind of vice—a thing to be ashamed of. As he furtively studied her face, which had still its warm beauty, its wilful youth, its passionateness, which a touch or an influence might convert into delicate but uncontrollable animalism, he thought, "Here is too much to struggle with. She does not care for me, and I must go away. I cannot hang about. I'm losing my grit."

He looked once more at her face as one looks at a lovely scene for a last farewell; and his soul, with pity and unappeasable desires, dissolved within him. Then he looked away.

"I called on Federan," he said: "I spoke my mind, and I did my best to help him."

"If I could not help him, how could you?" she asked, jealously. "Tell me this: if love can die out in this way, why love at all? why read so much about it? why write such lies about it? And it doesn't die in peace or rest in peace. I feel scarred all over, and the scars burn."

Harlowe moved uneasily and kept his eyes on the sea. "It doesn't always die. You are still fond of that man. He is riveted in the heart you think is broken. It isn't broken—it is beating for him; and if he passed by now, your colour would rush back into your face and your eyes would shine. I believe

your very hair would get that red-gold tinge it has when the sun strikes it."

She blushed at the idea, yet instinctively, hastily, eagerly, with a foolish secret hope, scanned the road, and, with an unreasonable disappointment, found it deserted.

"If we could have been always together, in some quiet place, far away from the rest of the world!" she said. "The others made the mischief."

She buried her face in her hands, and pressed her fingers on her closed eyelids as though that action could shut out the intruding light which lit up her world too clearly. She wished to die, and the wish had that real thirst which the young alone feel, in hours of disillusion, for death. She wished to vanish like a flame into the darkness and the shadows: the white butterflies soaring past her in the sun, the bees on the wild flowers near her feet, and the peaceful sheep winding their way, while they fed, up the downs, mocked her by their serenity.

"He loved me," she said: "he said so, and I knew he meant it. I was not deceived. We were too happy. I might have known it could not last. Now there's an iron wall between us. I was unjust; I was unkind. I ought to have made his faults my own and suffered for them with him. If he was disappointed in me, how have I disappointed him!"

"I shouldn't trouble myself about his feelings," said Harlowe: "he cannot have much sensitiveness.

He is like those people out at sea on a very narrow plank who try to push everybody else off! He consulted his own will and pleasure, and only wants to have his own way. I'm sorry I can't encourage you. That isn't true," he added, "I am glad there is no wrong bias in my prejudice against him. You found him out not a day too soon."

Every fibre in his being felt the irritation of her beauty, which was not for him; the softness of her low voice, which was still in tune with Federan's; and the witchery of her eyes, which still held the abandonment of her love for Federan.

She sobbed, and drooped by his side as poplars bend in a storm. "I've said good-bye to everything! I hate the summer—it's the loneliest time of all if you have no one. You think I had romantic ideas. You are wrong. We were to be very poor, I knew, and I didn't always see how we were going to live. This tortured me, because he has a dread of poverty."

"Poverty—with you!"

"You can't console me, because you don't understand me."

"Would to God," exclaimed Harlowe, "I could live to myself rather than try to understand you or help you! I may say the wrong thing, but I have loved you better than twenty Federans could love anybody. You talk of your good-bye to everything. What have I got? What have you given me in return for all these years?"

"I never promised you anything. I never told you I loved you. I never said I could not live without you. But he said all these things and much, much more to me. Why did he say them if he did not mean them?"

"I daresay he meant them when he said them—and you liked to hear them said. People confuse pleasure with happiness."

"I can't argue about it. What use are wise people? They don't seem able to prevent misery."

"What use are dreamers?" asked Harlowe, hotly.

"They have at least their dreams."

"But they don't last." He stood up and struck at the tree with his heavy walking stick. "Once for all, this must end. I shall make you hate me. We cannot agree. Plain sense and honesty offend you. I have seen enough of life not to play with it. I suppose you have not. Well, your eyes will open some day. You've been dear, intensely dear, to me. I've read of a man who used to pray to be saved from his own heart. That will be my prayer for the future."

She scarcely heard him : she did not care what he said or what he prayed for. To be alone with her own thoughts was all for which she wished. But she, too, rose, and they walked together to the wall, where he took her hand while she jumped down on to the road.

"Which way were you going?" she asked.

"Your way."

"You mean Franton way?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to Cumbersborough," she said, with a quick flush—for the intention was sudden, "to see Mrs Helmyng. She isn't well."

"Then you think we ought to part here?"

She nodded her head. "You own we don't agree."

"Still, if there was a chance for me, how gladly I'd bear the coldness and the hard words!"

"You are as weak as I am!" she said, with a cruelty which sprang from self-contempt; "of course we can do nothing for each other."

When he replied, the answer came like the cut of a whip. "May God forgive you! I swear I won't!"

In a moment she admired him and was repentant. "I didn't mean to be unkind. I'm beside myself. I don't know what I'm saying. I didn't mean to be unkind."

But his anger choked him. "It's too late," he said; "I've sworn. If I break my oath, you'll have the right to taunt me again. That's not to be borne. I'll never forgive you! I call God to witness!"

The latent, half-instinctive animosity which she had provoked in him during the early days of their

acquaintanceship now revived, and the long repression of his love gave his anger and his hatred, once let loose, a double madness. He thought he loathed her scornful lips, which looked as freshly red as cherries in comparison with the unaccustomed pallor of her cheeks. The little mirror on the gold chain hanging from her waist caught his attention ; and, as she had gazed in it so often, he snatched it with his hand, wrenched it from her belt, flung it on to the road, ground it into the dust under his feet.

"There !" he said, "that's how I'll trample your image from my heart ! You'll find me not so weak."

The indulgence of his fury gave him a strange sense of exaltation ; the almost brutal need of asserting his superior force, in some way, was satisfied ; he had been able at last to dominate her mood, to show himself the master, to defy the insolent beauty which, as an acid, had eaten into his whole nature—which had been a pain and a torture always, from the beginning. So, in his wrath, he believed.

"But for you, or *that*," he added, grinding his heel once more into the shivered gold and glass—"and *that* has as much worth as you have—I might have led a proper life, not a dog's life. I might not have lost my old ideas."

"I see now what has kept me from loving you," said Jennie ; "there is always a reason."

Harlowe laughed. "The reason is in my face. I'm

plain. I'm nothing to look at. I have worked hard, and I bear the marks. You prefer some showy scoundrel."

"No—the reason is in you. You're vindictive. You're tyrannical. Your work has made you pitiless and envious. You have lived too much among slaves. Go back to them. Go, while I can still try to think of your old kindness and the old days."

She picked up her long blue skirt and flung it over her right arm, while the silk petticoat underneath fluttered its flounces round her ankles. This method of lifting her dress when she walked was perfectly modest, but unusual. The movement, by its grace had delighted Helmyng at the ball. It exasperated Harlowe, and as she went away from him he allowed himself to think. "All the tricks! Every one! My poor mother summed her up years ago! The dancer's foot—she'd dance on me! And the spices of Arabia! Don't I know them! They are in the skin. There's foreign blood, too, in her veins. The hussy!"

But he found it hard to breathe: his throat was parched; his lips and eyelids twitched. A terrible magnetism drew his body and his will toward Jennie, and he longed to pursue her—if only to tell her that she was seeing him for the last time.

"I'll curse her! I'll curse her!" he said to himself. But he refrained from the curse and followed the road to Franton. "She's a vain woman. She likes the false better than the true."

He looked back : she was still sailing along with her black gauze scarf floating in the wind, and her skirts now clinging to her limbs, now wreathing round them like the draperies of nymphs in Italian pictures.

“I must forget her.”

He continued his walk, and his former ideas of devotion, of self-sacrifice, of pure affection—the affection which made a man’s soul better—made him laugh out loud, just as he had laughed about his own plain face.

“I have never loved any other woman. She loves Federan now, but she’ll love many more as well.”

This thought, which cut like a blade through his heart, he repeated, because it hurt him so much, and because something within him protested against its injustice and its savagery.

“Some day I shall find peace. It’s all my temper—I can’t bear to be beaten. I’ll never see her again—never, never again.”

This phrase worried him, and became a marching rhythm, till, after he had walked a mile or two, it lost its authority, and seemed left behind somewhere in the distance.

“Whether you give in to a woman or whether you break with her, you are bound to regret it. Either way—it doesn’t matter. There’s no cure. A right one will spoil you for the other kind ; the other kind will spoil you for the right one. And we

all meet Miss Wrong very early in the day, and most of us meet Miss Right too late. Who is happy? What's the matter with the world? If men spoke out they would all tell pretty much the same tale. The happy time is the moon-calf time. I had ideals when I was a moon-calf !”

He tried to feel his sentiments reconquered by the mere recollection of a young lady who had lived with her parents near his crammer's house in a Bayswater Square. The young lady had fluffy blonde hair, blue eyes and a short waist ; she sat near her window warbling “For ever and for ever,” “Some Day,” “Ask nothing more of me, Sweet,” and “Only once more,” while the young gentlemen played tennis. How it all came back ! The tinkling instrument, the girl's insipid profile, the eternal black velvet butterfly bow in her flaxen hair—much crimped—and the shrill treble voice insisting—

“ I *think* of all thou art to me,
I *dream* of all thou canst not be :
My life is *cursed* with thoughts of thee,
For ev-er and for ev-er.”

The words were those, or nearly those. How they had mingled with the hard hitting—*pom-pom*—of the tennis-balls ! How his heart had thumped when the girl's mamma, dressed in tweed, moved, at intervals, to the drawing-room window to gaze with suspicion and beneficence into the square ! How the girl herself would sometimes steal on the balcony

for a little air, and recline on a wicker-work chair with turkey-red cushions, reading *The Lady's Pictorial*, and fanning herself with a Japanese fan bought at Whiteley's! Appealing innocent creature! Where was she now? Not one of the susceptible young men who had longed to hear her sing for ever had taken any active steps to insure her constant presence by his side. Where was she now? . . . And then the life—the wonderful promenading life of Westbourne Grove! Harlowe, and a number of other young men destined, by ambitious and often distinguished parents, for diplomacy, the civil service, the army, and the bar, rounded off their costly education by strolling, in the pride of their youth and the glory of new raiment, through Westbourne Grove, where ladies of peculiarly striking charms also strolled after tea-time. Harlowe tried to think he had enjoyed that dashing existence—tried to persuade himself that the girl with the songs had been the good angel he had neglected.

“I'll go and see her.”

Did she still live in the square? Was she still unmarried?

“O Jennie! Jennie! what are you driving me to?”

The young lady's name was Simpson—Lena Simpson. Her papa was a barrister, and her mamma belonged to an excellent old Anglo-Indian family—the Cullomores.

“I’ll look her up ! Dear little Lena ! I believe she loved me.”

A cart happened to be passing, and he asked the man to give him a lift so far as the railway station. Thus he caught the express for London. He reached London at five o’clock. The air of the city was exhausted ; the dry wind blew particles from the wood pavement and the refuse of the streets into Harlowe’s eyes ; the noise of the traffic deafened him ; the scurrying crowd of ashen men and women on the pavements, the deserted Houses of Parliament, the sluggish sunless river, the Green Park filled with sleeping vagabonds and quarrelling children, deepened his sense of unendurable loneliness. He had intended to drive first to his club, but he changed his mind and gave the cabman an address in Bayswater,—

“Durham Square—I forget the number.”

All the houses in Durham Square are alike ; Harlowe knew the Simpsons’ house by its position. A parlour-maid answered his summons.

“Was Mrs Simpson at home ?”

He was conducted to the drawing-room. Yes, there was the piano, but it was closed. The terracotta plush curtains, much faded, still hung from the mantelpiece, disclosing, not a grate, but a basket of artificial ferns. The carpet was new, the chairs had been re-covered with a brighter chintz ; a number of old photographs representing the famous Cullomores in various stages of military and civil distinction had

been removed, and in their stead there were views, in frames, of Lucerne and the Italian lakes. Presently a lady about thirty-five, whom he had never seen in his life, came in. She was dressed very fashionably, he thought, and she resembled the strong wives of invalids at hydropathic establishments. He expressed the hope that he was not disturbing Mrs Simpson.

"I am Mrs Simpson," she said. "But," she added, observing his surprise, "you may not be aware that the first Mrs Simpson died two years ago. Mr Simpson and I were married last June. We have, in fact, just returned from the Continent. That is why we happen to be in town."

The views on the wall were explained. He thought the situation awkward, but murmured congratulations and wished he had not called.

"And how is Miss Simpson?"

Lena was not strong. Mr Simpson thought of sending her away. She wanted to become a hospital nurse; but of course one had to take to that sort of thing while one was young.

"It is so droll," said the lady, "to have a step-daughter older than one's self. I can't get used to it. I wonder whether you ever met my first husband—Raymond Haddington?" here she sighed profoundly, with unmistakable regret. "He was killed, one of the very first, in the war. I thought I should never get over it. But Mr Simpson has been such a dear kind friend to me. Between ourselves, Lena

seems to feel the marriage. I do my best to keep peace, but she is jealous. It's a great grief to Mr Simpson. Would you like to see poor Lena?"

Yes, he would like to see her. She rang the bell and resumed her monologue—

"I told her to come if I rang. She's so shy and odd. She told me you were one of her mother's friends, as I didn't know your name. Of course I had heard of it. Sir Harvey Harlowe's *Life* is in Mr Simpson's library. Quite a book to buy—the illustrations are so good. Lena gave it to her father as a Christmas present, and he was very pleased. Oh, we often speak of you, I assure you. I long to get out of this dreadful house and move to the other side. All my friends are on the other side. People say, 'You can always take the blue 'bus.' But the blue 'bus is an odious thing. Mr Simpson is beginning to give in about the other side. Lena is all for Bayswater. She's used to it. I shall never get used to it."

The door opened, and a small woman, with a faded flush and shining eyes, dressed in deep mourning and carrying a blind grey pug, came into the room.

"Miss Simpson!" he exclaimed.

"Mr Harlowe!" She held out the dog. "Have you forgotten him? It is Romeo."

He had bought the animal at a bazaar a long time before, christened him and given him to her. But in those days Romeo was a charming puppy, and wore

a scarlet ribbon round his neck. Lena had not changed so sadly as her dog. What she had lost in youthfulness she had gained in plaintive grace; but when she said, in answer to one of Harlowe's questions, that she had given up singing, he felt relieved. He did not want her to sing any more.

"We must make a completely fresh start," he thought, "on new lines."

Mrs Simpson said ingenuously, "I am sure you two would like to talk," and tripped out of the room.

"She is very kind to papa," said Lena, at once.

Harlowe observed that the house had no doubt seemed very lonely to Mr Simpson after his sad loss. He noticed with satisfaction Lena's neat figure, her tidy hair, her clear complexion, and her meek adoring glance. He did not know it, but she had grown to believe, and her relations had been taught to think, that Harlowe was the love of her life. The legend had grown, as such legends do, round the unmarried of both sexes. The single state has to be explained, a love has to be found, a credible story has to be invented. Lena's real love had not been Harlowe at all; the two absorbing passions of her girlhood had been bestowed in the one case on her singing-master, and in the other on her cousin—a young man who made a good marriage, and afterwards obtained a staff appointment under Lord Roberts. She often came across his name in *The World*—"Eddie Cullo-

more." But now that the brilliant Eddie was married to his Lady Maude Blechmere, Lena had put him from her mind. Harlowe was still left. Harlowe therefore became that mysterious, indispensable factor in every woman's existence—the fate she had possibly missed, or the fate she might possibly surrender to. Harlowe suggested a little walk in the dear old square. They went out together, and, as he had known her for such a long time, he lost a good deal of his loneliness, and he forgot many weary recollections.

"How do you like living with your stepmother?" he asked.

"I try to be nice about it."

He described his own house: a comfortable house enough, but he could not arrange flowers. What was a house without flowers? Again: a man by himself was often tempted to work late into the night. A mistake. Further: say one made friends. Hospitable as people were, one could not intrude into domestic circles: one could not become a hanger-on in any family. It was very pleasant in the square: the sun had set; a little breeze stirred the leaves of the trees.

"Did you think I would come back?" asked Harlowe.

"You never said you would," answered Lena.

"That's the odd part. Yet here I am. Isn't life strange?"

"Too extraordinary."

They found a sheltered seat under a plane-tree, and Lena, because it was so warm, took off her black gloves.

"I never touch the piano now," she said, glancing down at her thin fingers. "Music is so good at the Queen's Hall: one needn't strum any more."

"We must go to some concerts."

The power of the legend was upon her, and she thought that no woman had ever loved any man so long and so faithfully as she had loved Harlowe. What a pretty story it was! And it was, perhaps, coming to a happy end after all. It was like sailing into a calm haven after many nights on a shoreless sea. The peace she felt reached him, and soothed his anger and captivated his aching, desolate heart.

"This is what I want," he thought: "a kind good girl—a girl who hasn't been spoiled by men and flattery."

"Dear Lena," said he, aloud, "I have a very lonely home, and I have come to ask you to share it with me. I'm not badly off, and I'd do everything I could to make you happy. I have come back to you because I had to come back to you. Something made me come."

"Mamma," she said, blushing, "used to say: 'John Harlowe is the one. He'll come for you some day when you think you can't bear things much longer.'"

"So your mother said that?"

"Yes; a short time before she died."

"Well, I'm here."

She took out her pocket-handkerchief and dried her eyes. "Sometimes," she said, "it was hard to believe. . . . You never wrote, or anything."

"I'll make up for that," said Harlowe; "I'll show your people that your mother was right. She saw it all from the beginning. I am the one for you—you are the one for me."

The girl sighed and began to say, "I wish we had known it also, and sooner," but she checked herself.

"Dear Lena, I am devoted to you," he said.

He could not kiss her in the square, because it was a public place, and the impulse to do so was not overpowering. He pressed her hand, she pressed his gently in return, and they walked back slowly, side by side, to the house.

The amiable and astute Mrs Simpson, who had been watching them with opera-glasses from her bedroom window, came to meet them in the hall.

"Surely," said she, artless yet reproachful, "you'll dine with us, Mr Harlowe? My husband will be so disappointed if you run away again for years before he has seen you."

"This time," said Harlowe, "I am not going away for years."

CHAPTER XXI

"We must beware we presume not to sit as gods in judgment upon others, and rashly, as our conceit and fancy doth lead us, so to determine of this man, he is sincere, or of that man, he is an hypocrite."

RICHARD HOOKER.

JENNIE, meanwhile, had caught the electric tram to Cumborough, and alighted at Mrs Helmyng's door about half-past two in the afternoon. The Helmyngs' house, built of stone, two storeys high, designed before red-brick villas became the fashion, was one in a small block, on a side street, far from the sea and the fields. A brick wall with an iron railing enclosed some laurel bushes well clipped as a hedge, a plot of turf, a few shrubs, and a lime tree which filled the space between the gate and the front door: long curtains of green silk hung at each of the five windows, which were all open; and whereas the bells at the other houses were of brass, the one at No. 3 was of bronze.

Mrs Helmyng was lying on a couch in the room which Allan used as a studio—a room full of plaster casts, unfinished canvases, pieces of drapery, old pewter, and easels, but otherwise unfurnished.

When Jennie came into it she drew a long breath : "I love the smell of paint and all the signs of work !" she exclaimed.

"Have you heard our news?" asked Mrs Helmyng. "Bonnat, who was Allan's master in Paris, has sold one of his pictures to a dealer for four thousand francs. It was in the Salon, but Allan had no hopes about selling it."

"He must be happy at such a success ! I suppose it's a beautiful picture."

Mrs Helmyng sighed. "A very beautiful picture. Bonnat says it is finer than any Daubigny ; but nothing seems to make my son happy."

Mrs Helmyng had white hair, the pale complexion which often accompanies it, and very black eyes. She had been the belle of a cathedral town in her youth, and her elopement with the dissipated but handsome Dudley Helmyng of the Merchant Service had created a great deal of scandal ; ruined, it was said, her father's promotion in the Church (he was the Bishop's chaplain), and injured the chances of five younger sisters. She had been made to suffer in many ways for her imprudence : the marriage had not taken place without delay ; Helmyng's relations were indignant because she was penniless ; her own were distracted because Helmyng's father kept a shop—a large hardware shop—in Oxford Street.

"The man, I hear, sells saucepans and grid-irons," complained the wife of the Chief Constable

of Frampshire, whose own money was invested partly in a gun factory and partly in a fashionable restaurant.

Helmyng, soon after he became Captain Helmyng, died of liver, morphia, and drink, leaving his wife in wretched circumstances and his son with shattered nerves. Allan, however, had genius. Encouraged by his mother, who had a gift for loving, he worked admirably till his health failed, when the doctors ordered him to Cumbersborough.

"Now," thought his fellow-students and rivals, "he's done for. Poor Helmyng! *Besides, would he ever have sold well?*"

Mrs Helmyng explained that Allan had gone down into the High Street to order some turpentine. A good sign. He had not been painting at all lately. She glanced at Jennie.

"I was much condemned for marrying his father. No doubt he had faults, and I may have been unwise. If one loves one can make great sacrifices without feeling them. And the children of those who love each other have talents and charms which make atonement for the follies of their parents. I regret nothing. Allan has an almost religious adoration of beauty and a proud faith in his own dreams which ordinary people do not understand. They generally think there is a disproportion between the delicacy of artists' work and the almost gross brutality of their lives—when they can be known. Allan's love for

beauty is not confined to his art. Under his bitterness, he has deep feelings."

She had heard the rumour of Jennie's entanglement with Federan, and she was wondering how she could find out the whole truth of the matter. Allan had not mentioned Jennie's name since the night of the ball, but his habit of silence was growing daily stronger. The few sketches he made recalled Jennie: when the news reached him about the sale of his picture, he had brought anguish to his mother's heart by saying, "It comes too late!"

"I was the same!" thought Mrs Helmyng: "I was the same after I married his father. I cared for no one else. I wanted to tell him what I thought and what I felt—with my eyes fixed on his soul. And when I could not see him, I wanted to die. That was love. My son and I are alike. What is to become of my son?"

"You don't look well," she said to Jennie: "I'm afraid you're not happy at Franton Manor."

"I am going away from Franton. I can't stay there."

Surely, if the girl was engaged to Federan, she would not care to leave Frampshire.

"Allan and I wish to spend the autumn in Rome," said Mrs Helmyng. "We feel so rich now he has sold his picture. Why don't you join us? The greatest expense is the journey. Once there, we can go to a very comfortable *pension*."

"To Rome!" said Jennie, delighted—"with you? I could start to-morrow!"

Mrs Helmyng smiled. "Allan will be so glad. He is the best of sons; but my education was old-fashioned. I cannot follow all his ideas, and I am not the companion he ought to have."

She said this with deliberation, because she did not wish Jennie to forget that Allan would be in the party.

"I like to hear him talk," said Jennie, "but I am always afraid of boring him."

"That isn't the danger," said his mother, with a soft sigh. "He admires you greatly, and he always tells me that you have been such a friend to him. I do not believe that any man can work well in any sphere unless he has a good woman friend, in whom he can trust, and to whom he can turn for sympathy. If you read the lives of famous men, you will find that each one had some friendship of that sort."

Jennie, listening eagerly, flushed at the prospect of losing herself and forgetting her own despair in some intellectual devotion to a brilliant young man with whom she had always felt curiously intimate, although they had never exchanged a confidence. He understood her, she thought. She flushed more deeply, a few moments later, when he came into the studio. His figure was emaciated: he had never been conventionally good-looking, and, since the ball, he had grown a small dark beard, which made his fine eyes

seem larger and darker, and his cheeks paler, than they had ever been. His manner, Jennie thought, was courteous, but cold ; and she felt disappointed. Mrs Helmyng was too tactful to refer to the journey to Rome, and they looked at unfinished sketches till the time came for Jennie to leave. Then Helmyng offered to accompany her to the tramway.

When they were alone in the street, he said : “ I am crushed at my mother’s happiness about the sale of my picture. Once it might have meant something to me. It means nothing now. I have always known that the picture was good,—if I had not thought so, it would have been an impertinence to send it to a public exhibition. But its commercial success—not its real value—pleases my mother. She thinks now that the neighbours will be impressed, and that her absurd relations—they are unhappily mine as well—will forgive her for marrying the man she loved. Women have such long memories. She still broods over those old slights and squabbles which occurred twenty-six years ago. My poor mother ! ”

The rumour that Federan was in money difficulties had already reached Cumbersborough. Allan, on the pretence of buying turpentine, had, as a matter of fact, been trying to find out more precise gossip, in order to protect, if possible, Mrs Helmyng’s small investment. His worst fears had been confirmed by Colonel Howland, whom he met outside the Imperial

Hotel, where he had been telephoning vainly to Federan at Yafford.

"The man isn't there. They say he is at Franton Manor. Can we have a warrant issued for his arrest? And he is also mixed up in some painful way with that Miss Sussex. A bad business altogether."

All this had been poured into Helmyng's ear half an hour before he saw Jennie in his studio. What was he to do? The temptation to say all he knew against Federan was strong, because he abhorred him. But he bit his tongue at the sight of Jennie's sad face. "Something is wrong," he thought. "I must not hurt her."

"Mr Helmyng," said Jennie, suddenly, after they had walked a short distance, "you saw me drive away with Mr Federan on the night of the ball. I shouldn't like you to think that we were merely flirting. It was serious—at least, I was serious. We were not quite engaged when we started, but we were engaged when we came back." Her cheeks were now flaming. "He had already told me—that is, he had said enough for me to feel justified in seeming, perhaps, a little reckless for that one evening. The engagement is broken off now. That is all I wanted to say."

Helmyng drew a deep sigh of joy, but he kept his eyes lowered, because he felt the heat of her cheeks, the agony of embarrassment she was suffering, the love she still had for Federan,

"Federan," he said, "is a man I have never been able to know well. But he is very handsome."

"Yes."

"He has the artist's temperament."

"Yes."

"Oddly enough, far more of what is called the artist's temperament than artists themselves, as a rule, have."

"Yes."

All this was pleasant to her. She had broken with Federan for ever, yet she longed to hear him praised, excused, explained, if possible.

"If you have broken off the engagement, I am sorry for him. I must be sorry for him. I do not know what he may have done, but the punishment is awful."

"No ! no ! he does not love me now."

"In his wounded self-love he may say anything."

"It was my own fault. I failed him. I cannot tell you more, but he was in trouble, and I was harsh."

Helmyng asked gently, "Forgive me if I ask too much. Is there no hope of any reconciliation between you ?"

"No hope," she said, with vehemence. "I should despise myself if I ever dreamt of a reconciliation. You don't want me to despise myself?"

"I could never question your sense of justice in any case. But I feel sorry for Federan. He has brought it all on himself, no doubt, still—"

"It is killing me to break with him ! I am telling you more than I have dared to tell myself. Yet if it kills me, breaks me in pieces, I must nevertheless be firm."

The last time she had been on that road Federan had been driving by her side ; the scene was still the same—scarcely a leaf, she thought, was missing from the trees, the hedges were still full of honeysuckle and blackberry blossoms ; the ducks on the small common still quacked by the horsepond, and all these familiar external conditions made her changed sentiments harder to bear, more poignant, a crueller mockery.

"I don't want to take the tram," she said ; "all my fellow passengers seemed so happy when I came over this afternoon that they made me feel worse. I didn't see how they could be happy when I was so wretched !"

At every step she left in the dust a faint trace of her narrow shoes and rather high heels. Helmyng, who was fanciful, thought, "I wish my heart could be smoothed out as easily as a dusty road," and with his walking-stick he erased one of the footprints. He remembered all he had suffered alone by himself, and in crowds, in his small damp studio in Paris, in the room with a skylight in a West Kensington side-street which he had shared with another Academy student. He had always known that he was considered morose, disagreeable, moody, and rather con-

ceited—a dry and sinister fellow. What did they know of his pride and his impatience? of his soul weighed down by unutterable ambitions and unrealisable powers? of his fatigues—so difficult to conquer? of his temptations—so strong to his temperament and yet so repulsive to his better genius? What did they know of his discouragements, his disgusts, his inspirations, or his work? Had he not told himself ever since he was eighteen, “No woman will ever love you, and you will never be understood. You will live your life as you have passed your half-holidays at school—with your nose against a shop-window longing for beautiful things which are not for you?”

Jennie was now one of these beautiful things which were not for him.

“Tell me about your pictures,” said Jennie: “I am tired of myself.”

“I can talk better about other men’s pictures. Do you know the Botticelli in the Royal Palace at Florence? The girl’s face is the loveliest one, I think, Botticelli ever composed: she is like you. They call her Pallas. You remember it?”

He took Bonnat’s letter from his pocket-book and made a rapid sketch on the envelope.

“There! The eyes, the upper lip—you see? It’s too tender, too unsophisticated for Pallas Athene. When I think of that picture and the *Primavera* I want to bury my brushes.”

She liked to be compared with tender, beautiful, and matchless Botticelli pictures.

"May I read what Bonnat has written to you?"

"He is too generous altogether, and he is always prejudiced in favour of his own pupils. I don't deny I am flattered by his criticism. But you shall read the letter another time."

"No! Now, please."

He gave it to her, and she halted on the road to read it. One passage made her thoughtful; translated into English, it ran thus:—

"I am asking myself what sorrow you have had lately. There is a melancholy—so tragic, so famished, so overwhelming in this particular work, that I fear you are passing through some crisis. You have caught the gaiety, the very madness and intoxication of the Summer: you have put it, with supreme beauty and skill, on canvas, but you have done it from the outside—as though you yourself were in a dark cave and watching the world through some little hole. Another time join in the madness; be less distant and calm. The calm does not deceive me: it is another name for death in the soul. But the saddest histories in the world are the histories of its men of genius."

Jennie looked at Helmyng, but he had turned away and was smoothing out, with his stick, one more of her footprints. Was he really a great man—a man like Botticelli, or Turner, or Corot—a man whose pictures might one day hang in the National Gallery and be lectured on by university professors?

He seemed almost insignificant; he led such an ordinary life; no one paid him any especial attention or thought him remarkable in any sense—except for his bad humours. The county had not heard of his existence, and the well-to-do barely knew him by sight; the tradespeople did not think his custom worth having. “Yet,” she thought, “strangers may come here some day, from all parts of the globe, to see the little house where Helmyng lived with his mother.”

“Bonnat is very sympathetic,” she said, “and the French have great insight into character; but I hope he is mistaken about your unhappiness.”

“He may be. I won’t maunder about it anyhow. My belief is that everyone feels a gnaw or a pinch somewhere, and things are more even than they would seem, judged outwardly.”

He remembered all the far-off and confused afflictions of his adolescence: the morbid loves, the sullen struggles between his imagination and his experience, the tumult and the torture of a nervous system tuned to the highest key of life and played on in the lowest depth of melancholy. And yet, under all the fatigue which seemed a disease, and the prostration, which often destroyed his powers of work—an immense will to live, to create, to enjoy existence, and to proclaim the triumph of his dreams over mortality, had never yielded. That was true: his will had never yielded. He set his lips, and Jennie, walking by his side,

thought of the sick kings who led great armies out to victory, of the fainting saints who had controlled vast congregations, of the bent men whose mighty music thrilled the spheres, and the sad ones whose joyous words had the warmth of the sun. She began to feel a little afraid.

"How can I talk to him?" she thought: "he must think me so silly. I will read some clever books. And yet, he is always patient with me. I'll ask him if he would like me to be clever."

"Would you like me to be clever?" she asked, abruptly: "because I'm not. When I think too much, my head aches. I like to go on . . . this way. Sometimes, without any warning, an idea flies into my mind. Then I think, 'I will tell that to Mr Helmyng next time I meet him.' But I forget it, often, before I see you."

"You give me, without knowing it perhaps, too many ideas."

This pleased her, too, and she smiled.

"Will you promise to finish some of those sketches? I know a little about pictures—not much; but papa knew a great deal. He once wrote an article on Watteau and Goya for the *Nineteenth Century*. His chief at the War Office was annoyed, and told papa it was a bad thing to get known as a *dilettante*. I remember the very words, because papa quoted them again and again."

"I happen to have that article," said Helmyng:

"it was a piece of real criticism. Your father had an artist's soul."

"I am writing his life," said Jennie, with a pang of remorse—she had not touched the manuscript for weeks: "it is called *Sunt lacrymæ rerum*."

But her attention was suddenly attracted to a man and a boy who were pasting a large bill announcing the Weddestown Races on the advertisement board outside the "Three Bells" Inn.

"Your cousin has invited me to her box tomorrow," said Helmyng: "are you going?"

Jennie's misery began afresh. "I can't go," she said, in distress. "Mr Federan will be riding for the Challenge Cup. I can't go. How could I go?"

"You must go," said Helmyng: "you have spirit—show it. You don't wish him to think that you are afraid of seeing him!"

"I'm not afraid! Yes, I am," she added, in a humbler voice; "you are right."

"If you have the courage to own it, you have the courage to conquer it."

She wanted to lean upon his arm, but she paused in her walk, and turned her face, which was now full of shadows, especially round the eyes, toward his. "One moment I think I don't care so much after all; then I find that I do care." A slight sorrowful contraction appeared at the corner of her mouth, and she seemed as irresolute as her words. "You will

think I have unintelligible romantic notions," she said ; "but just as there are many people who cannot visit graves, I cannot bear to see anyone who has disappointed me."

"Each time you see him," replied Helmyng, "he will be less and less a disillusion—more and more a man, a human being. And as a human being you will judge him newly."

"You take his part."

Helmyng winced at the thought of the hatred he had been able to stifle and disguise.

"You surely cannot think that I ought to forgive him?" she said.

"No; but you flatter him too much by refusing to see him. He will not believe that you have changed. And until you consent to see him I myself shall not be able to think that your heart is quite out of his power."

"You have said it. My heart has been in his power. I must get free."

The enslaved Helmyng declared,—

"It is natural that a proud woman should want her liberty."

"You can still think, then, that I am proud?"

"I know it. If you were not proud, you would not be suffering so intensely."

"How do you understand these things so well?"

He did not know; perhaps it was a matter of instinct, he said.

"I think you are right, and I will go to the Races," said Jennie, presently.

He observed the beauty of her arms, of her shoulders, of her profile, and of her rich brown hair. In the pleasure of that contemplation he forgot his rage against Federan; and there was something in these rare but brilliant and passionate glances which revived the girl's afflicted spirit.

"How can I help liking him?" she thought. "I liked him at first sight, before I knew Gerald."

She found herself humming a song, and she looked quickly at Helmyng for fear he should think that she had exaggerated her grief, or was by nature shallow. But he accepted the song as simply as he had listened to her confession of folly; both were, to him, matters of nature beyond her control or his own wonder.

"It is strange," she thought, "but I could have had twenty minutes more time with Gerald on the night of the ball if I had not gone back to the room for my dance with Helmyng. I wanted to go back. I could not break my word to him."

She knew now that she would have to attend the Races, but the prospect was not so painful as it had been, and the thought that Helmyng would be there by her side stilled the wild beating of her heart. They stopped, at the end of their long walk, at the Franton post-office, and Jennie sent a telegram to the Duchess accepting her invitation for the morrow. Helmyng wrote it out, in order to save her the trouble, he said,

of taking off her gloves. He had seen that her hand was trembling; that she was still, in spite of her resolve, a little reluctant to sign the warrant for a painful ordeal.

"It will be an ordeal," she said, as they left the post-office.

Helmyng lowered his eyes: he felt such a profound pity for her weakness and such an invincible determination to assert his own will.

"See it through!" he exclaimed.

"I know you are right, but something may come over me at the last moment—when I am dressing. I'll get cold from head to foot; I sha'n't have any strength. I know everything is at an end between us, and that we can never, never, never care for each other again. I don't love him now."

"Did you ever really love him?" said Helmyng, gently.

She seemed almost terrified by the question, then she resented it. "Would all this have mattered if I had not loved him?" As Helmyng remained silent, she went on—"I don't know. What is love? Could I justify myself—could you find an excuse for me, leaving love out of the story?"

"I asked, did you really love *him*—the man, the man the world sees?"

"Yes, every inch of him."

Helmyng thought. "One can recover from the love of inches!" But he would say nothing bitter, nothing cynical, nothing piercing.

"If no one is completely happy," he answered, "no one is completely unhappy. On the other side of the limit fixed to all suffering and all joy, there is a sort of stupor."

He could not have owned this the day before, and even at that moment it seemed more consoling than true.

"I hope I shall attain the stupor to-morrow," said Jennie.

Afterwards, when he finally said good-bye to her and left her at the Manor gates, she wondered how he knew so much about love, and she tormented herself by speculations about his life in London and Paris. Who was the woman? where was she? was it hopeless? Perhaps he would tell her the whole history some day. Would she dare ask him about it? No. Already she feared his reserve, and dreaded any sudden coldness in his voice. He had been just in his remarks about Federan: she almost believed that he liked Federan. It seemed strange, in the circumstances, that he liked Federan at all. Yet, why strange? Ah, who was the woman who had taught Helmyng so much about love? and why was he in despair? Did Bonnat know the story? Then, when Drover, the butler, told her, as she entered the house, that Mr Federan had been gone for some time, the old jealous agony stole through her limbs and veins. Why was not Helmyng there to take her part? Why did she have to bear the hardest things alone?

CHAPTER XXII

Two separate divided silences,
Which, brought together, could find loving voice ;
Two glances which together would rejoice
In love, now lost like stars beyond dark trees.

ROSSETTI.

THE Weddestown Races were organised mainly by noblemen and others in Frampshire who were anxious to attract a high-class sporting population toward their respective properties. A county soon becomes languid and negligible unless it has some centre of activity into which the passions and tastes of its inhabitants can converge. Something had to be done for the drowsy province. The Marquis of Frampshire declared privately that agriculture was played out, that the health resort and seaside hotel business had been worked to death, that scenery, as a draw, meant cheap trippers, that birthplaces of famous men were a bore. So he laid out an exceedingly picturesque course on the outskirts of his own park, built a grand-stand, inaugurated a club, and, after three or four years, the Weddestown races became as fashionable as any semi-private meetings of the kind in England. Every

individual in the county who had a spare bedroom or so entertained a house-party for the three days ; boxes in the grand-stand were at a premium ; tickets for the enclosure were reserved for members of the club and their friends ; the club itself was bound by peculiarly exclusive and old-fashioned regulations—"On the lines," the Marquis had said, "of the Royal Yacht Squadron at Cowes, which, *out of season*, fulfils one's idea of a club. During the Regatta week, I'm told it is intolerable, and I avoid it. At other times I do as I please there, and I'm quite fond of the place."

Jennie's cousin, Constance, Duchess of Lereford, gave a garden-party every year, and attended the races every year : these were her public appearances, and the rest of the time she lived in comparative seclusion. Having read the lives of Isabella D'Este and Vittoria Colonna, she wished, within her narrow opportunities, to foster the arts, and produce a kind of renaissance in Framphshire society. But she was not a rich woman ; she found it hard to maintain her house and establishment in the dignified style considered proper to her rank ; her influence, she soon found, depended rather on the amount of money she could keep in local circulation than on the kind thoughts and right feelings she was so anxious and able to dispense liberally. This discovery, to a mind essentially timid in spite of its ambition, had been depressing ; she kept a journal, which was to be

published after her death, and she wrote charming letters to a Canon of St Paul's—who was her greatest friend. She had married the Duke of Lereford for his position ; but among duchesses she was not considered important, because she was poor and childless, and, though she belonged to an excellent family, she was not allied with any powerful one. When people looked up Sir Fortescue Sussex and his kin in Burke they found the stock antique, the early history chivalrous ; the moral,—“ *Noblesse oblige*, commercially appraised, has no surface value.”

Lady Framphshire, one of the Megbies—a great banking firm—said openly,—“I remember her as a girl in the cheapest frocks, without a penny in her pocket, too glad to be invited anywhere. How she got on no one knew. She couldn't pay her cab-fares, and when she came for a week-end she remained for months. Lady Lessing made the match. She was in love with the Duke herself, and married him, as a last precaution, to that simpleton, in order to shut people's mouths. It answered. That's the cleverness of Hortensia Lessing. Anyone would say, ‘How *could* it answer?’ All I can tell you is—it did. Hortensia Lessing and the Duke were really fond of the poor little thing, and now, even though the Duke is dead, Hortensia is still very kind to her : has her at Southcourt for the big shoots ; yes, and when the Prince and Princess go there. That will show you. That's Hortensia all over ; once her friend

you are always her friend—her worst enemies own that.”

The widowed Duchess awoke, on the morning of the races, with a leaden weight in her breast. She knew too well the artificiality of her power in the neighbourhood, and she shivered at the prospect of meeting the crowd of London people who were always invited by the Frampschires, Peverils, Pangbournes, and others for the event. Constance Lereford was not pretty; she had a longish nose, a sallow complexion, a wide mouth, and a great quantity of black hair, which made her head imposing, if out of proportion to her body: she wore long pearl earrings, and her figure was willowy. But, wishing to resemble the photographs of bereaved Royal personages, she clad herself in tailor-made mourning, which was far too harsh for her picturesque, intelligent countenance.

When her carriage drove up to the gates of the enclosure, and she saw the flags waving, when she heard the strains of the military band, and recognised a number of faces, she smiled correctly right and left, held her lilac silk parasol a little higher, and felt that she was creating, after all, a certain sensation. The Frampschires and their party had already arrived; the boxes were crowded, and the Duchess, out of perversity, had invited no one except Jennie and Allan Helmyng. They were both waiting for her at the entrance; and the three crossed the lawn, climbed

the stairs, took their places, and gazed around at the dazzling lively scene as though they were quite unaware that every field-glass in the assembly had been turned with frank curiosity toward the Duchess's box. Who were her friends? Not a soul among the county gentry had ever seen Helmyng, or heard of him. Jennie's astonishing beauty drove several gentlemen to the assertion that her name was on the tip of their tongues. One swore that he had seen her at the last Court ball. She was Lady Somebody Something's girl. Helmyng, it was decided, was an eccentric peer, a relative of the late Duke's.

"Is he in love with her?" asked young Mrs Peveril, immediately. Her life was spent in conjecturing who loved whom.

Jennie surveyed the course while her cousin pointed out the dangerous corners, the worst jumps. Several hundreds of well-dressed couples were sitting on chairs or walking on the lawn in front of the stand: more had congregated in the large paddock to the left in order to judge the horses, see the riders, and consider their bets. A dense black line of shouting, chattering, tittering, excited spectators had gathered on each side of the course, where fortune-tellers, and photographers, vendors of drinks and cakes, scent-squirts and racing cards, camp-stools and fruit, were administering, under competition, to the needs and fancies of the mob. Many, having unharnessed their horses, had drawn up their vehicles to the side, and the drags,

brakes, farmers' carts, governess-carts, dog-carts, gigs, and wagonettes were packed together with democratic fairness in the order of their arrival, and filled with representatives of every class in Frampshire.

Helmyng, who was gradually learning—as clever young men must—that he had far more in common with his fellow-creatures than he had ever supposed was the case—responded to the excitement, the glow, the pleasure and the humanity around him. Where he had once suspected, in his yearning for the stars and vagueness, the hatefulness of a large crowd, he now felt its loveliness, its good-humour, its patience, and its profound unconscious philosophy. The poor sad nervous Duchess, with her mask of set friendliness, bowing unwavering bows to acquaintances who were themselves masked, sad, and nervous, offered a tragic contrast to the blowsy radiant women who stared at her and her set from the people's side of the course. The talk, simpering and laughter went on: the London ladies, covered with artificial precious stones and clinging muslin, or clad in cloth gowns, severely cut, either flirted, or complained of their health, or discussed, in the slang of the stable, the horses, or watched each other, or started in couples, nominally to see the animals and actually in pursuit of the officers in the paddock.

Sir George and Lady Pangbourne occupied the box next to the Duchess of Lereford. Sir George had an air of sorrow, and his wife, a drooping conciliatory

woman, made conversation by assuring the members of her party and her acquaintances that they looked extremely well. Her remarks reached Helmyng from time to time.

"How well you are looking ! But why didn't you bring your husband ? No ! Not the gout again ? I must tell him about Colonel Warboys. He has found a wonderful cure. Colonel Warboys, you know, is the dear whose daughter married Lord Alfred Debenham. She looks *so* well. Is she here to-day ? Do find her. Ah, dear Lady Chillingworth. How well you are looking ! Where is the General ? He was looking so well, I thought, the other night. Are you going to the Soames' garden-party on Saturday ?"

"That everlasting croquet !" exclaimed Lady Chillingworth.

"You needn't play. Daisy Soame never plays, and I fancy Charlotte Soame doesn't play. But I cannot be sure."

"I saw Charlotte play at the Peverils' last week."

"Did you ? It's a pity she's so stout, although she looks well, and it suits her, poor thing. George says that she dances beautifully."

"Stout girls often do," said Lady Chillingworth.

A rouged, buoyant, and emaciated woman, dressed in painted gauze and wearing an immense Rubens hat covered with plumes, peeped in at the Duchess's box.

"What do you think, Connie? That little pig of a man, Captain Hallard, is going to ride that old crock Godiva. I hope she'll break his beastly little neck."

She stared at Jennie and went on, "I'm putting all my money on Federan, a local man. Colonel Bellebrough and his lot are simply furious, because Federan's a rank outsider, and they say he has no business to ride at all. There's an awful row going on. I daresay it is rather hard luck to be beaten by a perfect nobody. He's not a member of the Club, and it is quite irregular. Major Beaumont is gnashing his teeth. The crowd will have Federan, it seems. You ought to have heard them cheer him. The Lord-Lieutenant wasn't in it. He looked pretty sick, I can tell you. Lady Frampshire says that Federan is quite a person one can know, and too good-looking for words! The officers' feeling against him is snobbish jealousy. The darlings *are* snobs; I always tell them so. And I *must* put my money on him if he is going to be tiresome and win. I'll come back presently, dearest, and tell you more."

She showed her teeth at the Duchess, stared again at Jennie, and disappeared.

"That," said the Duchess, "is Mrs Tommie Montgomery. She is staying with the Frampshires."

Jennie had heard of the lady, who was the greatest social success of the most fastidious, the most cultured, and, in its own opinion, the most powerful

set in London. She could talk, it was said, on any subject, and it was certain that her husband had large means. Several poor gentlemen of taste adored her, and few women had the courage to deny her delightfulness.

"Look," they would say, "at Leila Montgomery."

They would look at Leila, and they beheld a slight person of coarse fibre and infinite amiability, unscrupulous, uneducated, affectionate, defiant, and easy-going.

"She has all the elements," Lady Frampshire said, "of a popular success."

Jennie wondered, Has Mrs Montgomery ever loved? ever suffered? ever wanted anything she could not get? Has she ever shed a tear? felt a pain in her soul? Has anyone she cared for ever died in anguish, of over-work? Does she know anything about money troubles?"

The forlorn girl imagined that nobody could talk so loud, or show such vivacity, or grin with such persistence, unless she were happy.

At last several races were run: the noise and shoutings and discussions grew louder, more confused, more spasmodic: the note of gaiety changed to a minor pitch; the bursts of laughter were false, forced, and vulgar: money had been lost, hopes had been reversed, the pleasant excitement became charged with anger, anxiety, suspense, and the din of recriminations. The steeplechase for the Challenge

Cup, which was the great event of the day, had roused a great deal of ill-will. Federan, who, it had been rumoured, would not ride, had nevertheless appeared in his most dashing, devil-may-care mood, on his chestnut mare; and he had been recognised, with loud oaths of constancy, by the mob, cheered, re-cheered, and backed heavily—much to the exasperation of the officers of distinction, who, at the eleventh hour, had entered their names for the Cup under the belief that Federan would be absent. Jennie saw him gallop down the course; his face was paler than usual, but he had never looked so handsome. She cowered behind Helmyng, and, as the roar of affection rose from the crowd, and the murmur of admiration gathered volume in the boxes, tears gathered in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks under her veil.

“Be plucky,” whispered Helmyng; “take the glasses. Don’t let them see you. Thank God, they are watching him, not you.” She broke, in her agitation, the slight gold chain on her chatelaine, to which her purse was attached. It fell with the purse to the ground. Helmyng picked them up, but she begged him to put both in his pocket as she had none. She was trembling and she held his arm.

The Duchess, whose thoughts were with her Canon, took no interest in the mob or the riders or the squabbling. She gazed at the sky, which was as colourless as her own life, and she wished she had

remained at home, where she could meditate undisturbed on the possibility of re-marriage and the sacrifice of her title. It gave her so little satisfaction ; it had proved such a dreary adornment. Yet, whenever she thought seriously of resigning it, her spirits sank. Why had the Canon not been born a duke? What a tiresome, ill-arranged world !

"I cannot watch him," said Jennie. "When does the race begin?"

"They are at the starting-point now," answered Helmyng.

There were three false starts.

"I can't bear it," said Jennie.

"You must. They're off now. He's in superb form. Fisher is leading."

"Take me away !"

"I will not. He is all right. Now the first jump. Over ! It's child's play to him. Fisher's down. Hard luck."

"Take me away !"

"Federan's third now. He's saving himself."

A silence.

"Take me away !"

"Well done ! He's still third, but he's over."

Another silence. Would it ever be broken ? Was he dead ? Had she grown deaf from terror ?

"What is it now ?"

"The water jump. He's caught up. He's leading. Another man down."

Jennie felt the horse's hoof on her eyes, her brow, her heart—surely she was in the ditch : not insensible, but in agony. A yell of delight broke from the mob. Federan had cleared the water-jump in his usual style.

“How many more?”

“Three more. He can ride. It's a beautiful performance. Give him his due.”

There was the same strain, the same silence, the same agony; a redoubled yell of gratification from the lookers-on. Jennie's head was swimming; every nerve had its own pain, and with every beat of her pulse she heard a tolling doom. But her fears were unnecessary. Federan cleared in turn three more obstacles, and won the race easily.

“What a fuss about nothing!” said Helmyng :
“I told you he'd win.”

“Who has won?” asked the Duchess, languidly.

Mrs Tommie Montgomery ran down the corridor behind the boxes, clapping her hands, and screaming like a peacock before rain, “I've won fifty pound. What a dear man!”

Lady Chillingworth in the next box resumed, with roving eyes, a conversation. “First his poor uncle died of inflammatory gout—such a painful disease! Then his cousin was thrown in the hunting-field. Too shocking. Then his own poor father died of typhoid fever—caused by drinking milk at a wayside inn in the Balkans. The rashest thing to do!

Then his eldest brother, Charles, was drowned in the Solway Firth. A succession of fatalities."

"And Charles always looked so well, too!" murmured Lady Pangbourne.

The inanity of this mechanical prattle—rattled off by rote and listened to by the distracted—was more than Helmyng could bear. "There is nothing worth seeing now," he said, in the bitter, violent and contracted tone of a man who has lost patience as much with himself as with his circumstances.

Federan, greeted by volleys of applause, cantered down the course to see the two injured riders he had left behind—Major Fisher, who had a dislocated collar-bone, and Captain Laidlaw, who had broken his wrist.

The Duchess murmured, "The horrid ambulances are over there. It's a barbarous amusement. Last year a man in the 17th was killed. I'm quite ready to go."

Helmyng and Jennie accompanied her to her carriage; they thanked her for her great kindness. She invited Helmyng to lunch on the following Sunday, and Jennie for the week-end. Then she drove away—the first person of consequence to leave, and although no one followed her example for some time, it was acknowledged that her vacant box left a gap.

Mrs Montgomery, having secured her fifty pounds, said loudly, "I'm fond of the woman myself. She's

très grande dame. A little too duchessy and on her hind legs now and again, but that comes of living among country frumps. They'd all be sitting in her pocket if she didn't stiffen her jaw. Why doesn't she amuse herself, like other people? Don't ask me."

Jennie and Helmyng walked in the dust down the long line of carriages till they found their fly.

"We'll drive to Franton. It is only fourteen miles. The train will be impossible," said Helmyng.

"As you please."

After they had passed the crowd, and turned from the high road into a lane, Jennie's anger burst forth. "You had your way. You kept me there. You saw that I was on the verge of a breakdown. . . . Nothing mattered. You had your way. In your place I would have acted very differently. Never mind; I know what I think of you."

She did not know what she thought of him, but she feared that no man who loved a woman would have risked, to such a point, the danger of thwarting her mood.

"But you did not break down," said Helmyng: "you saw it through."

The salt of her tears still smarted on her eyelids. "You have no perception," she answered, and her voice failed.

"To-day I've been your faithful friend—nothing

else," said Helmyng. "I did not once think about myself: not once. If I had been weak, you might have been weak. Believe me, or not, as you please, it was the moment for decision."

"You have dragged me through knives. A brave performance, I must say. Men speak of running the gauntlet—a trifle to this day's work!"

"The knives you felt were on his account. The knives I felt were on yours. We have both endured a good deal of slashing—if you consider the situation."

She coloured a little, and said, almost in raillery, "That's all very well. Nothing you can do will ever make me think you tactful."

"To be tactful, or to be thought so, is not, I own, my chief aim in life."

She tried to catch his glance, but he looked steadily away.

"He is cold and analytic and self-contained," she thought: "his knowledge of things is wholly artistic: people, to him, are phantoms. If I interest him, it is because he thinks I look like Botticelli's *Pallas*. How dull for me!"

"You are not in touch," she began, "with natural feelings. You care for nothing except ideas. The idea of a sword in one's heart is not especially painful—the feel of it is quite another matter. I have suffered, in this last hour, more than you will ever dream of in your whole existence."

"How can I contradict you? You are alive, I know, and whoever lives pays for living."

The carriage rumbled on, and the horse's heavy, even trot seemed to regulate, by degrees, Jennie's whirling thoughts.

"I hope you don't expect me to see Gerald again?" she asked.

"I hope you won't lose the spirit you have shown to-day."

"Don't try to deceive me. I had no spirit. I know too well."

"Confess now; you are glad you went; you are glad you remained." This time he turned, looked well into her beautiful soft eyes, and writhed under the torture of keeping his own inexpressive.

"She must not know for certain that I care," he said to himself. "The instant she is sure, she will try to play upon me. I shall be played upon, and then she'll pity me and whimper for Federan. I'll not be a supreme fool if I can help it."

"Confess," he repeated aloud; "you are glad you went."

"I'll never say that. I am just where I was before,—every bit as miserable, and ten thousand times more discouraged. Formerly I suspected my weakness; you have proved it to me. Look at that hollyhock growing gloriously on a stick!" She pointed to a cottage garden they were passing. "Take away the stick: the hollyhock, glory and

all, will be on the ground. You were the stick to-day; we both know what I was. Thank you; I've had my lesson. If you were anybody else, I'd hate you."

He was gazing up a path through a meadow where the old pear trees, bent by the strong wind that swept across the common, resembled broken arches. The grassy road was deeply entrenched by cart-wheels, but the spaces between the ruts were full of poppies and gorse, wild marguerites and purple thistles. Birds, in that district, were so tame that they lingered on bushes near the footway, or perched on the backs of fat sheep. A robin redbreast was resting placidly on the rail of a stile as Helmyng and Jennie drove by. She saw that Helmyng was observing these details—taking an artist's pleasure in them.

"You have got an eternal refuge," she said: "your art comes first."

"I like to think so."

He was still entreating himself not to prove a supreme fool—after all.

"Life is made so easy for men. Gerald wins a race. You have sold a picture which, they say, will be hung in the Luxembourg. I read that in the *Daily Mail* this morning. They compare you with Whistler. What are a silly girl's feelings to you or to Gerald? He can ride. You can paint. What is left for me? I can weep my soul out, and die."

"You know how to turn the screw! I have worked hard: I have gained a small prize. But I think it has come too late."

"Suppose it had not come at all?"

"I can imagine myself being worse off than I am. In that sense I am fortunate. But otherwise I have not had the things which stimulate one's will, by offering it what flatters it, what satisfies it. My achievements have been an effort—the fruit of labour and sorrow, not the fruit of joy and impulse. No doubt some of the most beautiful, the most enduring, the purely disenfranchised objective work of the world has been done by slaves: they had so much to forget that they hurled themselves—mind, heart, and body into their tasks as men leap from a burning ship into the sea. A man's unhappiness may be good for his work, I grant you, but it is not good for him. Never think so."

She smoothed the folds of her dress, watched him cautiously, and said, "You need not answer me. But I have told you so much about my troubles. Won't you tell me about yours?"

"Formulated they would sound too foolish. One wishes to be what one is not. One wants to have what one cannot get. One believes something one does not really think. One feels there is splendour somewhere one has not seen: one waits and waits and waits for some one else who does not come. I don't

say I'd be less desolate if she came. Fate brings the unwilling often."

"Men do not need love as women need it."

"Some pretend they do not, but they all have their attachments. There are degrees in love, as in everything else. I don't wish you to think, however, that my troubles were love troubles. My own ideas were my troubles."

She sighed, and said, ironically, "I could very well bear the troubles which came from an idea. I see we are not alike. The wonder is that we have become such friends. But you are easy to talk with because you are impersonal."

"I try to be just."

"You succeed."

Then she remembered the complete and voluntary devotion he had shown her during the days at Mrs Marblay's school. Had he changed? Had he reconsidered her? What had she done? "I suppose you will live in Paris, or abroad, after this?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm tired of Cumbersborough. I hope you won't break your promise about Rome."

"I meant to speak of that. It was your mother's suggestion."

"So she told me. I was not looking forward to the journey. Now I do. We'll see Rome together—not the usual sights, but the country outside the walls."

He looked at her again, and he noticed that her mouth was less mournful : she was smiling for the first time that day. "In Rome, who knows?" he thought, "she may grow to depend on me."

"Let us stay in Italy a long while," said Jennie. "I want to begin again. . . . I want to forget, Gerald always declared that money alone could buy happiness."

"I won't talk false sentiment. Money makes a difference; it is in one way or another at the root of most sorrows. One cannot move without it. Philosophers, as a race, have been men of private means. Federan himself said that to me the last time I saw him. He was right. The over-anxious have no time to moralise."

She trembled, but a wave of quiet passed over her face, making it simple again and childlike.

"I'll quarrel no more with life. I'll take it as it comes. I suppose I tried to make it over to please myself, leaving out the hard facts. They wouldn't seem so hard if they were called essential. But everyone pretends at first that they are unnecessary. And the intense wild feelings we take for love, may not be love. . . . I don't know. . . . I'll be patient."

Helmyng longed to take her in his arms, and promise her all the happiness she had lost.

"You haven't had a feeling, I am sure," he said, "that wasn't deep and wasn't true."

"But selfish all the same," she added. "I was

proud of him, and proud because he loved me, and I wanted him for myself. When he disappointed me, my pride was revolted. I was ashamed of him. I am ashamed of him now. There ! At last I know what is hurting me the most. I am ashamed of myself for having cared so much for a man who could be such a liar. If he had grown old and plain and tired, I should have gone on loving him just the same. But I can't forgive the treachery. That has humbled me to the dust in my own eyes."

This was a new aspect of her grief, and Helmyng thought it the right one.

"We are both proud," he said.

The self-mastered dread the tyranny of a dominant affection, and stubborn men, who yield lightly enough to their fancies and the caprices of chance, suspect, and subdue, and try to ignore their strongest feelings. Helmyng now wondered whether art and pride could not, by themselves, fill his life.

"Why should I care so much ?" he thought : "she's the loveliest thing I have ever seen, but beauty in people has not the everlasting power of beauty in art. Take the bronze Apollo at Florence ! Take the *Night* of Michael Angelo ! Take a Velasquez ! a Corot ! certain poems, certain phrases in music, certain harmonies in colour, certain orchestral symphonies ! They enter one's soul : they don't excite this egoistic hysteria, this romantic melancholy that dies when the senses tire."

His mother had ever warned him, "Don't marry a woman whom you can just manage to live with, but the woman without whom you cannot live at all." He could live without Jennie, or at least he could live after a fashion, feeling old while he was young, and beyond joy before he had reached it.

Jennie's gloved hand rested on the red velveteen cushion of the fly, quite close to him. He wished to take it, he thought he could do so calmly, and he meant to say, "Beautiful child, keep as you are always. Ask no more questions. Your tears will never burn you up. Your desires will never weigh, like mud, upon your wings. Never watch the falling stars; never see the creeping shadows." But he dared not take her hand, and he could not utter a word.

Knots of villagers were collected now at every turn of the road, and women, with their children, were leaning over every gate.

"I wonder whom they are waiting for?" said Jennie, suddenly. "This is unusual. One can walk or drive here for miles and never meet more than a cart or a few labourers."

Helmyng replied that there was very little wayside life in rural England. One always wondered who did the field-work and who occupied the cottages. The people, where they existed, apparently dwelt in their backyards or drudged in their back kitchens. He stopped the carriage, and called to an old man,

who, having spread his coat on a heap of stones, sat upon it smoking.

"Why are so many people about?" asked Helmyng.

"Young Federan," said the man: "'un's coming to Franton. We wants to see 'un. 'Un has won the Cup again."

For a second Jennie hoped, "Perhaps he is coming to me!" Then she said, "He is coming over to see his aunts! They'll be very excited." But the truth pierced her at last. "He is going to Rachel," and she sank into the corner of the carriage.

Helmyng did not speak; a poet had said to him once, "There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth. It lasts a short time—don't resist it."

"Youth has resisted me," he said to himself bitterly; and he believed that Jennie, womanlike, thought it a greater thing to win a challenge cup than to paint a beautiful picture. "If Federan were to come now and put the Cup at her feet, she would forgive everything. Perhaps she is right. Why condemn the senses? *On doit dire du bien le bien*. But for me—the idea, the unchangeable, constant silvery idea! If she cared for me, as she cares for him, what could I give her? No other woman can ever come between us, but one's intellectual passions are exacting—far more insidious than the quickenings of mere sentiment—a matter often of wine, and opportunity, and climate. Still, one is a man first and an artist afterwards. What rubbish is talked

about the artistic temperament—especially by the idle and unproductive, who loaf about, mistaking their limp backbone for heavenly-mindedness !”

The light had grown softer : he could see the white new moon : the sky over the hills was deeply blue : the rich green foliage of the trees had something vibratory and perfumed—there were so many shades of green, so many pungent scents, so many leaves that moved and trembled and thrilled and quivered in the breeze.

“One is a man first,” he thought again : “the heart won’t sleep.”

At last the carriage stopped at Franton Manor.

“I want to walk up the avenue,” said Jennie : “the sound of carriage wheels disturbs Rachel. If you walk with me you’ll lose your train.”

“That doesn’t matter.”

“But your mother is waiting for you.”

This did not matter either : he saw, however, that Jennie wished to be alone.

“Good-bye, then. I’m afraid you are tired.”

“Yes, I’m tired,” she answered : “all the same, I’m glad I went.”

“Is that really so ?”

“Really so,” she said.

After he had left her she realised that the day, apart from the race-meeting, had passed happily. She was sorry it was over. Then her face grew crimson. “I am recovering. I am an unfaithful

woman. . . . But I liked Helmyng from the beginning. He has always held his own. And he was on another plane. It is clear, too, that he cares nothing much about me any more. He's cured. But in Rome he may be nicer. How coldly he said good-bye !”

She sat down on a stone bench in order to pick off some small wisps of straw which had caught her lace flounces as she left the course ; and she said, as she threw away each piece, “He loves me : he loves me not.” She was saying this anxiously when a horse ridden by a tall man trotted down the avenue. The rider was Federan. She grew rigid : she stood up ; she said to herself, “I am not seeing him willingly, yet I am able to see him.”

In the distance, with the wind blowing her garments, she seemed to Federan as splendid as the statue of Nike in the Louvre and as inaccessible : not a girl, but a goddess. He felt sick from humiliation and the acute sense of all he had sacrificed and all he had destroyed. The horse, obedient to his faintest touch, slackened her speed. Federan jumped from the saddle.

“I wanted to see you,” he began : “I was wondering how it could be arranged.”

She looked down and saw there were several more straws on her flounce. Then she met his beseeching glance calmly, without reproach, without any pleasure in the desperate affection she read there.

CHAPTER XXIII

For winning love we win the risk of losing,
And losing love is as one's life were riven ;
It cuts like contumely and keen ill-using
To cede what was superfluously given.

THOMAS HARDY.

THERE were blue hydrangeas growing round the stone bench, and they were protected by a high hedge of flowering myrtle. The silence was so calm and the solitude so sweet that long-forgotten pictures of peace, of happiness, of tender inspiring love, rose before the young man's sombre mind, and he could find nothing to say. While poverty faced him, he had at least the illusion that riches brought felicity : now that a fortune was his for the asking, he had no illusions at all. He might be saved from public dishonour, but he could not be saved from the accusing voice within. His dreams were his best, and he had sold them for a few luxuries.

"I wanted to tell you," he said, "that Rachel knows everything. I am tired of lies. I deceived her : I misled her,—purposely, in the first place. But I have made a clean breast of it. God knows why you ever cared for me, or why she cares for me

now. There's a divine goodness in women that humbles a man's conceit."

"There was nothing divine in my love for you. It was selfish—a madness. Her love is better than mine."

He thought she must be acting—perhaps with some intention of making his situation less difficult and his chastisement less severe. Women, he had observed, having once conquered their jealousies, often erred on the side of generosity. For it was an error to attempt to persuade him that Rachel's love exceeded her own.

But Jennie continued: "She's more constant, more patient than I am. The moment I saw you were not so tall as I had imagined you to be, I began to change. Your handsomeness became another kind of handsomeness—it didn't count. Oh, forgive me! But that's true. I cannot keep loving any one who is not strong. I know you have won cups and crosses. That strength is good, yet there's another strength I'd rather have. I was proud of the cups and crosses. I'm still proud of them—because they must give you a certain satisfaction. I was proud of you when the people cheered to-day. But I'm too weak myself to be kind to weakness. Some women help and encourage half-hearted men. I cannot. I'm just as unfaithful and just as uncertain as you are. We are too much alike. We loved and flattered our own faults in each other."

She was now very agitated, but her earnestness amazed him. How the girl had altered !

"I wasn't strong enough to help you, Gerald. I want somebody to help me—somebody I can obey and follow. If I had followed you, where should we have gone ? "

She was dressed in grey of some transparent, diaphanous, floating material, which seemed to emanate, like a vapour, from the block of stone on which she stood. Her pretty mouth, which he had kissed so often and so passionately, seemed insensible or asleep : it no longer provoked him, or defied him, or enticed him ; her eyes were as dim as the sea under a mist ; she was fading from him, leaving him for ever. A flame ran through his veins : "No ! no ! It is all because we were young," he exclaimed : "we are not to blame. It was natural enough. Give me another chance, Jennie. I can't let you go. I see now how you have suffered on my account. Give me another chance. I have disappointed you."

"Will you disappoint Rachel also ? " she asked. "Can't you keep your faith with anybody ? "

"I'll tell her, if you like, every word I've said to you. She understands me : she makes allowances for human nature. In the long run, she will score."

"Yes, because she will take you on any terms. She began well by seeing you plainly : your faults appealed to her cynicism. To her, you were always a man : to me, you were an ideal. There's the difference."

"You are not yourself. This strain isn't natural. Bear in mind, I have had my dose of trouble during the last few days, and it may well be that I haven't made the best of my case. I don't pretend it's a strong one. You may call me unfaithful and dishonest, or anything you please, but if you think I'm not just as devoted to you as I ever was, you do me a cruel injustice."

"Yet you are engaged to be married to another woman !"

"I am not. I have told another woman my wretched, humiliating story ; if she consents to be my wife, she'll be my redemption." He laughed bitterly. "I'll need a lot of redeeming. Ah, Jennie ! if you can't forgive me, try to forget where I failed. The dead sleep in peace under the sod : let your love die, then,—don't let it turn to hate. Don't tell yourself that it wasn't beautiful once—never say it was folly. Say it's dead. As for me, I'll go on loving you, without hope, of course, but never without a certain happiness."

"We weren't for each other, Gerald ; it wasn't to be," she said, with a tremor in her voice. "I have spoken hardly to you, and it shames me to remember the bitter words I used and the revengeful thoughts I had. It didn't seem a quarrel with some one else, but a terrible, grievous struggle with myself. We drag each other down—we may be too much alike. I've said that already. If life were all kisses and

dancing, we might have held eternally together : each kiss would have been sweeter, and each vow would have seemed truer than the last. But there's so much more than dancing ! We didn't bear one single test. You didn't want to be poor with me ; you didn't want to live in a humdrum way with me ; you were not willing to take one risk of being in the least less comfortable than you were ; you would not make one sacrifice ; you would not work. If we could have gone to some small palace in a sheltered garden, and wandered in orange groves, and heard nothing but nightingales, and possessed all the horses and riches and servants and liberties that money can buy, then we might have gone on well enough—till I lost my youth. I know it, oh, I know it too well. I would have gone in an attic gladly with you. That doesn't matter. Clodhopper lovers will do more for each other than we did. The love that glorifies meanest things, the love that shuts out every doubt, the love that takes all of you—leaving nothing for misery—was not for us. It all comes back to this—it wasn't to be."

He could not deny her indictment : it was true. "You know that song you used to sing," he said huskily ; "it always sent a shiver through me—

‘Rappelle-toi, lorsque les destinées
M'auront de toi pour jamais séparé,
Quand le chagrin, l'exil et les années
Auront flétri ce cœur désespéré,

Songe à mon triste amour songe à l'adieu suprême ! ’”

"This is a kinder parting than the last," she answered, "but . . . it is a parting. And it's for the best."

"I want you to be happy."

"Yes—yes. And I—you."

"This is saying good-bye to my soul."

"No, it is saying good-bye to a mistake."

"The sweetest days of my life. My God! they'll never come again."

"But the sad, cruel days won't come back either."

"Kiss me good-bye, darling."

She covered her face with her hands. "Don't ask that."

"I meant—as a friend."

"No! I am sorry! I must say no. That's ended."

The shadow of his future—after too much drinking, too much eating, too much ease and idleness, fell ominously on his countenance, just as the tremulous, intangible hours to come seem to haunt a sun-dial. It is not the past alone which has its ghosts. But Federan himself found encouragement in Jennie's refusal to kiss him. Surely it meant that he had not lost his old power over her yielding, flower-like nature. Had he not called her often, in his solitary raptures, his fragrant, lovely rose, his to hold, to have, to inhale, to press, to enjoy, to delight in?

"Dearest," said he, stepping nearer, "we hoped, I know, to share every thought till we became one

soul. But there's no originality in that. It's the common case, and we must not blame each other because we can't accomplish the impossible. Our dream is everybody's dream at some time, but it has been realised by no one. I'm giving up poetry. It makes me discontented."

She looked at him again. It was her last look at the man he had never been: once more he seemed the Sigurd, the hero, the king of her body and the well-beloved of her soul.

"If I had followed you," she asked for the second time, "where should we have gone? We should have reached a blind alley and been prisoners there—unable to turn back."

"What a fancy! There is always a way out. . . ."

"Perhaps — after disenchantment and despair. And where can the disenchanted go? They have lost their footing in the real world—they have found out the deceptions of the unreal. There is no place for them."

"Then what are your plans?" he asked abruptly: "you must have some. You're still a girl . . . you are just beginning life. You'll get to see things in another light."

She blushed, and said she was going abroad with the Helmyngs.

"The drawing-master?"

Federan could not express his astonishment; he was stupefied; he opened his eyes, looked at her, and

wondered what he was thinking, suspecting, imagining. . . .

"Why with the Helmyngs—of all people?"

"I like them."

"I know very little about them."

"They are quiet, very proud, very poor—almost as poor as I am."

He bit his lip. "No doubt you will have an interesting time. Helmyng, they say, is clever. But— isn't the arrangement rather odd? Is it quite proper?" His inconsequent provincial ideas of etiquette added a sting to his other profound misgivings.

"Quite proper, I should say," answered Jennie.

"You were always rather Bohemian in your tastes," he said thoughtfully.

The mare, tired of waiting, was pawing the ground and rubbing her nose against Federan's shoulder in order to attract his attention.

"Be quiet, Pretty Girl," he said, filled with an inexplicable anger; "keep still!"

Pretty Girl tried the effect of a playful bite. He turned round and hid his face in her soft mane.

"I am not forgetting you," he said. "Thank God, I've got you. I'm not your ideal, am I?"

The animal's magnificent brown eyes, humid, indulgent, and full of something transcending human tenderness, looked at him gratefully. He threw one

arm round her neck, said good-bye again to Jennie, and walked away, as though he were the led and not the leader, by Pretty Girl's side. He offered a fine enough picture, if movement and modelling alone could satisfy the heart.

Jennie knew, that, although there still were many more good-days and good-byes to be exchanged between Federan and herself, the eternal adieu, the one that is never spoken, had been made in the office at Yafford. But as she grew more used to her disillusion, she began to understand that it was Federan's love of pleasure which had been the cause of all his own trouble and her own; and because she loved pleasure herself, and with pleasure all that was beautiful, rare, moving, subtle, and luxurious, she had been drawn to him irresistibly. She still felt the magnetism of his presence and the old delight in his handsome face. She had forgotten, in her hours of uncontrollable misery, how handsome he was, or, if she had known it, she had not thought sufficiently about it as something which counted for more, in a direct encounter, than the most binding moral ideas. The whole time they had been talking, she had noticed, with joy, all the points she had always admired in his countenance and his figure: she had felt what a pity it was that he and she had to part; while the anguish of jealousy throbbed in her bosom when she reminded herself that he was going to Rachel—who loved him in spite of his treachery,

in spite of his weakness. Rachel did not see the degradation of accepting a man on any terms. For a second, Jennie almost wished she could be as insensitive as Rachel ; and she began to draw comparisons between Rachel's future life with Federan and her own desolate life with no one. She could not imagine herself ever loving any man as intensely or as unselfishly as she had loved Gerald, and the idea of yielding to a lesser love shocked her pride. Federan, by his conduct, had humiliated her, no doubt, to the dust, but her own feeling for him had always been romantic, always ideal, always something which she could think of as a gift from God. It had helped her to understand so much, and it had given her such visions of earthly happiness, such insight into the secret forces of humanity—the forces which keep men and women inseparable in spite of the clash and peril and ugliness of outward events.

What was she to do ? She had a voice : perhaps she could become a public singer, and find, as men find, the refuge for her loneliness, and the cure, in a career. Helmyng, who had been, as it were, in the background of her meditation, seemed to come nearer when she thought of careers and art. It was evident, from Bonnat's letter, that Helmyng had a great future in store for him. She looked down at the remaining straws in her flounces. Did he care for her ? She knew it. But she also knew that any absorbing intellectual work makes men capricious

and grudging in their love: that they differed essentially from women, who were ever willing, under the stress of a great passion for some one individual, to renounce power and glory in both worlds. The woman without a human love sees no happiness for herself in heaven and no agony to fear in hell. Knowing all this, it seemed trivial to pluck straws, for an omen, from a muslin flounce. She wanted to cry—to weep and weep and weep, because she belonged to the suffering, incomprehensible sex, who are eternally distracted between their loneliness of body and their loneliness of soul—paying, backwards and forwards, for one with the other, debtors always, either to their dreams or to their compromises,—the dreams that cost too much, the compromises that can never be paid for.

“I could enjoy life, but I do not enjoy it,” she thought: “I see all the gladness, and the gaiety, but it is not for me. Is it for anybody?”

It was so hard to be young, and all alone in a world where every tree and flower had its companion, or perished. She had no companion, but she had to go on living, and she was expected to go on laughing. Of course she could think of others, and find her peace in theirs: she could lead a life of silence, self-abnegation, and prayer. But prayers for what? For peace? She did not want peace—she wanted her illusions back again; she wanted once more the drive with Federan after the ball, she wanted to hear

him say once more that he loved her and her only, she wanted to stand by his side and lean her head against his breast, and believe once more that he would so hold her for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, till death. How could she pray for such impossibilities? Yet how could she pray sincerely for anything else? She had a strong religious sense, a sense of the unseen and the mysterious, but she could not accept the orthodox theory and pictures of a future existence; and the practice of destroying one's health by fasts, insufficient sleep, overwork, and no recreation—as a means of seeing more truly into the Divine origin of mankind—seemed to her simple logic almost insane. How could she trust the speculations of the exhausted? When she felt well she loved this world, and when she felt ill she was too tired to care about the next. This seemed to her a reckless, perhaps wicked state of mind, and it added a deeper pang to her unhappiness.

“I am not a good woman,” she thought: “I am not pious, I have not even got the consolations of religion. I am all for the lusts of the flesh.”

Yet this was not true either; the truth was that she longed for human affection.

“Please God—” she began, and finished by blushing deeply.

The last wisp of straw worked out thus:—“He loves me.”

CHAPTER XXIV

Lord, what is man ? why should he cost Thee
So dear ? what had his ruin lost Thee ?
Lord, what is man, that Thou hast over-bought
So much a thing of nought ? . . .
Love is too kind, I see ; and can
Make but a simple merchant-man.

RICHARD CRASHAW.

RACHEL, meanwhile, had been forbidden by Dr Rench to leave her room, and she spent the day in a fever of suspense. Federan, after the races, had sent her a telegram, but when it came she placed it on the table by her bedside and left it there unopened, dreading to read its contents.

"If he has lost the race, Tagg," she said, "I shan't be able to bear his depression, and if anything has happened to him, it is my own death-warrant."

Tagg implored her to break the envelope.

"I dare not. I'm such a coward. See how I'm trembling," said Rachel.

About five o'clock in the afternoon Tagg suggested that she might saunter into the village and hear what rumours were afloat.

This Rachel forbade: "I can't be left alone. I

die at every sound. Who would be a woman? Why did I let him ride? I could have kept him away!"

"And he would have hated you ever after for making him break his word. That's men all over," said Tagg. "Last time he won, I remember, he came over to see his aunts, and the people stood at corners to cheer him. The wind is in the right quarter now: if there's any cheering, I can hear it."

"Listen with all your might," said Rachel.

Tagg perched herself on the high window-sill: Rachel swallowed a sleeping-draught and folded her hands. Half an hour passed. Then Tagg, with a cry, thrust her head out of the window.

"They are cheering. I hear them distinctly."

"It is your fancy," said Rachel: "listen again."

They both listened. The sound was faint, but it was unmistakable, and it came a little nearer, grew a little louder.

"Could they be cheering anybody else?" asked Rachel.

"Now is the time," said Tagg, "to open the telegram."

The sleeping-draught had dulled the acuteness of Rachel's feelings, and she broke the seal.

"*I have won. Am coming,*" she read.

She threw her arms round Tagg's neck, she cried, she laughed:

"They are cheering him. He will take his right

place in the county yet. He shall go into Parliament" She repeated this half a dozen times, and kissed Tagg and kissed the telegram.

Tagg retorted by shedding a few tears and losing her temper.

"You might have known this two hours ago if you had opened the thing, and you need not have taken that beastly drug. And now, instead of having plenty of time to dress in, you must hurry yourself.

Garments of every shade, every material and every fashion were brought, by Tagg, from the wardrobes. Some of the gowns had never been worn, others were almost shabby.

"This comes of giving in to so many fancies," said Tagg.

At last her mistress chose a dress copied from one worn by Bernhardt in the first act of *Francesca de Rimini*.

"It won't suit you to-day," said Tagg, "I'd wear something more like *real life*—one of the embroidered muslins. It looks quiet—more like a lady that is just engaged to be married."

"What nonsense you talk!" said Rachel, who was delighted nevertheless; "I am sure you read the *Family Herald*."

"I never look at the paper; what I'm telling you now stands to reason. When a lady has money and she wants the gentlemen to feel at home, she can't

dress too plain. A single but handsome jewel worn half hid will remind him that the wherewithal is handy."

"You are too quaint for words, Tagg. Where do you pick up your language?"

Tagg tossed her head:

"Language," she said, "is nature to some."

The embroidered muslin was found, and Rachel wore it—with a large sash, and a bunch of pink roses and heliotrope. When Federan, embittered by his conversation with Jennie, was shown into the drawing-room, Rachel, smiling, was there. He was so grateful for the welcome that he called her "Darling" and meant it; he took her in his arms, and after a long pause, she sobbed,—

"I should have been just the same—if you had not won. I adore you. It is idolatry. You may as well know. It may make you vain, but it will also make you careful. If you deceive me after this, I'll kill myself. It is as serious as that."

There is one form of love which springs so directly from the very spring of life that the most egoistic man will feel abashed when it is offered him, and the lightest woman is afraid to recognise it, for it goes deeper than any appetite, and it can soar higher than any flight of celestial philosophy. Federan knew well enough that the cause of this love was not in himself, it did not depend on his looks or his merits or his manners. It came from something far away and not common.

"You don't make me vain, dear Rachel," he said ;
"you make me ashamed."

A stillness came over her ; she pressed his hand against her cheek :

"I could be clever. I could hide it all. They say that we can manage men better by being reserved. But I don't want to manage you. I want to love you, and I want you to know that I love you."

She asked him questions about the race and the people he saw. Were they nice to him ?

"Oh, as pleasant as possible."

"I'm glad of that. I have ambitions. I won't tell you now. Another time." Then she said abruptly : "Have you heard from Coolidge ?"

"Not a word."

"Why do you always take his part ?"

"He was kind to me when I was a boy. He took me out for my half-holidays. He was the one person who ever gave me any pocket-money or any pleasure."

"But he betrayed you ; he deceived you ; he might have ruined you."

"All that, I admit," said Federan, "was a very bad joke."

She could not persuade him to use a stronger term. She admired his loyalty again, and thought it noble, till a sudden flash of instinct showed her the situation in its true light. Federan's unwillingness to criticise his friend arose from the fact that he

himself had embarked with a bad conscience upon the original enterprise. She forgot that she was to have been the victim of their intrigue, and she reproached herself for having revived a subject which gave him pain. She did not know that her gentle forgiveness had touched notes of remorse in his unhappy soul which no penalty could reach, and of which bare justice could never guess the existence. He had just seen Jennie, and he felt that he could never love Rachel as he loved the beautiful, wayward, uncompromising girl whose pride was stronger than her heart. He felt that, much as he owed Rachel, sweetly as she soothed him, kindly as she judged him, dear as she was becoming by her tenderness, she was not the woman who belonged, by right, to his destiny. It was all a mistake—one of those mistakes which can never be mended. His mind was still with that unyielding, defiant figure standing by the stone bench of the avenue; he still saw the young, angry face, the long, wet eyelashes, and the eyes full of farewell, pitiless condemnation and resentment. What were the advantages of fortune if one craved the unpurchasable?

“I have ambitions for you,” repeated Rachel, touching his arm.

He listened eagerly :

“I want to please you,” he said. “I have never worked well since I was born, but I’ll work for you. I have never been faithful to anyone, but I’ll be

true to you. And I hope I have done with lies, dear Rachel."

He intended to say more, but she stopped him.

"You have seen Jennie?"

"I have."

In the effort to escape from her own sensation on hearing this piece of news she pulled off her rings, and they rolled down her dress to the floor—she cared not whither. They were valuable: Federan observed them, but she was glad that he did not pick them up.

"Yes, I have seen Jennie," he said. "It was a dreadful meeting. It was as though we had both met after death—looking and talking as we looked and talked in life, but being dead all the same. I can't describe it. I can't bear to think of it."

"You are very fond of her, Gerald. You singled her out of the whole world. But don't blame me if I ask you never to see her again."

This was not a wise request, she knew; but the thought of his having been with Jennie had kindled such a desperation within her that prudence seemed contemptible. She moved away from him, and she felt that they had grown, in a second, wide gulfs apart.

"My God, my God!" she thought, "I'll die if he hesitates."

"I'll promise anything you wish," he said; "but, in any case, she can't come between us now."

"She is between us. She's as much between us as though she stood here—in front of me."

"That's a nervous fancy," he replied, but he knew she was right.

"Do you want to see her again?"

"No. How can you ask such a question?"

"Is it a strain to see her?"

"An intolerable strain."

"Then, don't you know what that means? She is knit up somehow in your very bones. How can I fight against a thing that's constitutional! See her! I don't care. If I had met you first it might have been different. She hasn't taken you away from me—I am trying to take you away from her. I am trying to make you untrue—a bad beginning. She's the one, of course!"

"You would not think so if you had overheard our conversation."

"What did she say?"

"She is going to Italy with the Helmyngs."

"You will never make me believe that she cares for Helmyng—except as a friend."

"That may be, but for some reason, and in one way or another, she likes him."

"Do you mind very much? Ah, you do!"

"We shall never be happy, Rachel, unless we both put her out of our thoughts. I wish, from the bottom of my heart, that I had never cared for any woman except you. But there were others—before

Jennie. I have often been in love. You alone have understood me. I don't say that I'm worth understanding."

She came to his side again, and wondered when she could trust her voice—it had suddenly gone.

"Won't you help me, Rachel?" he said; "won't you try and make something of me? It will need a miracle—a miracle of love that the best man on earth at his best could not deserve. And I'm one of the weakest at my worst. I can stick on a horse, and I can march miles; I can shoot, and all the rest of it. Judged from the outside, I do pretty well. But you know me as I am. I'm no catch."

She fetched a deep sigh: did his inches, his shoulders, his looks count for nothing? "But you're so handsome," she said involuntarily; "it makes me forget sadness just to watch you."

"It doesn't make me forget sadness—just to be watched."

This was said in his old manner, because he always quickened under admiration and responded to it—as animals do.

"I was depressed when I first came in," he went on: "there's a reaction after the excitement of a race. In such moods one says more than there is to say—one exaggerates and twaddles and maunders. Do forgive me."

He thought her charming and grace itself; every one of her movements was picturesque, and

her excessive femininity made his confessions of moral weakness very easy. He kissed her, and implored her to be sensible. She said she was, if anything, too sensible. She trembled at her own sense—which could be grim.

Tagg, fearing that her mistress would get overtired, ventured into the room. She pointed to the clock and stammered out—"Dr Rench's orders."

"You are quite right, Tagg," said Federan: "we must take care of her. And what is more, I won't allow her to climb those stairs."

He lifted the unresisting woman in his arms, and carried her, as though she were a child, along the corridor and up a small flight of steps to the door of her room.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Tagg, following.

Mrs Tredegar, hearing an unfamiliar footstep, came out of her boudoir, and in consternation surveyed the group. The three smiled at her, and she realised that Federan was already the master of the house.

"Is Rachel as light as she looks?" she asked with irony.

CHAPTER XXV

Lord, I have fasted, I have prayed,
And sackcloth has my girdle been.
To purge my soul I have essayed
With hunger blank and vigil keen ;
O God of Mercy ! Why am I
Still haunted by the self I fly ?

R. H. FROUDE.

MRS HELMYNG, after Allan had left home for the racecourse, went round to the little Catholic church close by—although she was not a Catholic, and prayed that her son might be happy. She sat there in a dark corner by herself—out of the world's way—too loving and lonely a woman to suppose that a young imaginative man could exist at all without some romance to inspire his life. He was a great artist, and he worked all day—but work by itself was not enough. Of this she was certain. She had watched all his efforts, shared his struggles, done her best always to encourage him, but he was too self-reliant to accept encouragement graciously even from her.

“What is to become of my son ?” she asked, as she knelt in the dim side-aisle. “Haven't I had trouble enough for both of us ? Surely so much trouble isn't necessary. God intended us to be happy, we make ourselves unhappy. It is not God's fault.”

She believed in human love and divine love, and she thought that love could accomplish anything. When she sat, as she often did, for hours in the church, her gladness was in remote recollections of words, tones, scenes, and little acts of her engagement and married life—innocent trivialities which were inexpressibly precious to her heart. She kept them to herself because she was afraid of Allan, afraid of her few friends, afraid of everybody except God, with whom she never felt sentimental or guilty, and in whose house she always found it so easy to meditate on her secret feelings and memories.

When she asked, therefore, "What is to become of my son?" she thought that some day her question would be kindly answered. She had been sitting in her corner for a long time; an old woman had dusted the pews; a few stray girls had been in to light candles and pray; some children had passed through on their way to a Catechism class; half a dozen small boys had made their confessions to the parish priest. The priest himself, in leaving the box, had thrown his usual puzzled interrogatory glance in Mrs Helmyng's direction, and as usual she had shrunk back, unwilling to break the spell of mystery and silence which she could find only in that quiet spot. She had lost all count of the hours, but she knew that it must be nearly six o'clock, because the Sacristan was lighting the gas lamps for Benediction. How peaceful it had been! She wondered whether Allan was enjoying himself with Jennie—

whether he would come home in brighter spirits; whether he would be able to remember what the Duchess wore: whether he had received many congratulations about the sale of his picture. She was slipping quietly out by the side door when she noticed Allan himself in the opposite aisle. He was on his knees—an attitude in which she had not seen him since he was a little boy learning his prayers. What did it mean? At first she feared he was in trouble—men sought religion, as a rule, when things went wrong with them. She longed to go to him, but she dared not; and, in an uneasy frame of mind, she returned home to wait for him there. The evening was sweet and fresh, calm and melancholy: there was such a hush over the town that she walked almost on tiptoe for fear of hearing her own solitary steps; and there was such a soft light in the sky that she thought of nights in June long ago, when she was a girl.

Allan found her, when he came in half an hour later, sitting at the window painting menu cards. Her humour was whimsical, and she drew delicious fays, elfs and fairies, or flowers that danced.

“Have you enjoyed yourself?” she asked.

“Oh yes—but more in remembering it than at the time. I drove with Miss Sussex to Franton, and I took the tram back. Federan won the Challenge Cup. He’s superb on a horse.”

“How is Jennie?”

“She likes him, mother. She will never like any one else so much.”

"I was very fond of a young barrister before I loved your father. I have never told anyone that, but it's true. I should like to think I had only had one love, but I was absolutely devoted to Charlie Haversham."

She blushed, and Helmyng never knew what the harmless admission cost her ; but she made it in the hope of relieving his mind about Jennie.

"I was heart - broken about Charlie on a Wednesday," she continued, "and on Thursday I accepted your father. He spoke just at the right moment. If he had put it off even a week—I might have answered him differently. High-spirited girls must be taken by storm. I was high-spirited ; so is Jennie."

Helmyng became thoughtful.

"If a man really wants a thing, he will ask for it," said his mother ; "and if he really loves a woman, he will take any risk rather than lose her."

"You mean all this for me, of course," said Allan. "Dear mother, Jennie doesn't see me as you do."

She looked at him gravely.

"Did I say so ? But she will see a man of genius and character."

He wanted to ask more about his father's abrupt wooing ; yet the subject was difficult. Mrs Helmyng, he knew, had been as beautiful in her own way as Jennie was now, and his father had been erratic, poor, obscure and unpopular.

"Can a girl love one man on Wednesday and another on Thursday?" he asked.

"They will break off with one man on Wednesday, and listen to another on Thursday."

"To be listened to, as you call it, is not what I mean."

"Your father did not ask me whether I loved him. He acted as though it had all been settled for us. We were coming home from a picnic. We had lost the others, and we were taking our time because it was a glorious afternoon. He said, 'I suppose you know that I have got to look out for you: you're such a little fool.' It took away my breath. I thought him rude, but, of course, truthful. . . . In the end I ran away with him, as you know, and we had troubles. But I never regretted the marriage—never, never."

"If one didn't hear these true stories one could never know what men really say to women."

As she had at last broken the reserve of a lifetime, she told him more of his father's brusque sayings and doings. Presently she found herself laughing gaily, as she had not laughed for years, at some of the dialogues which had taken place during her courtship.

"It always made him angry to think that he loved me," she said. "If I ever dragged a little compliment out of him, he would look injured for days. If he ever showed any real feeling for me, he would be almost cruelly cold afterwards. That was his disposition."

"I don't see how you stood it," said Allan, who

recognised the similarity between his father's temperament and his own.

"Well," she said, colouring, "it wasn't always easy for me. I had my days of impatience."

Allan went to his studio, looked at his canvases, and said to himself:

"What more do I want than these? They are always here—waiting for me. I cannot disappoint them, because they are themselves my moods." He sat down and thought of many plans: then he hunted through an old bookcase for a map of modern Rome.

When his mother came in an hour later to call him to his supper she found the following lines scribbled on a sheet of paper and placed on his palette:

"I am going to Franton, as I find I have Miss S.'s purse in my pocket. She gave it to me to hold because the chain broke. I must, of course, return it immediately."

He had gone out by the studio door through the small back-garden. Mrs Helmyng wondered whether he had kept the purse on purpose, as an excuse for seeing Jennie again that day, or whether he had really forgotten to hand it back when they parted. It seemed, in either case, as though Fate were working in her boy's favour.

Helmyng reached Franton about nine o'clock. The trains were late on account of the races: he met all his acquaintances, and he heard a great deal of contradictory gossip about Federan's affairs. At the station he saw Miss Mason and the widower exchange-

ing fond glances over the weighing-machine, and tittering about the mechanical fortune-teller.

"If every one could be so easily satisfied as Miss Mason," he thought, "happiness would be almost universal."

Mrs Puddifant, in a rustling purple poplin, spoke to him because she had observed him sitting in the Duchess's box.

"A delightful day. Such a treat to see all the aristocrats and the nicest people. Quite like the Row on Sundays!"

Mrs Marblay was even more gracious. She had read the news about his picture in the *Daily Mail* :—

"Such an honour! I hope you'll never forget that you taught in my little school." She drew him aside, and added confidentially :—

"I'm so thankful that the Duchess invited Miss Sussex. Many thought she would not—on account of the stories about young Federan. An *imbroglio*, indeed. The Duchess can afford to have the courage of her own opinions. But what *is it* about young Federan? Does any one know exactly? Is it true that he is privately married to Miss Tredegar? One hears such reports! One doesn't know what to believe. Poor Miss Sussex? A pretty girl, but a face is not always a fortune. Proverbs do a lot of harm. There's the dear Viscountess Raynbeigh! She sees me." Mrs Marblay's whole body contracted in spasms of the purest pleasure :—

"How charming she looks in that exquisite gown!

I think she would like me to speak. Have you never met the Viscountess?" Mrs Marblay drifted away toward a lady who looked mournfully resigned to the trying duties inseparable from a county race-meeting.

Helmyng, in bitter wrath, pushed his way through the crowd and bribed a flyman, by six times his ordinary fare, to drive him to Franton Manor. As he was about to enter the gates, another fly was leaving. There were two small boxes on the seat by the coachman, and the initials "J. S." in white paint showed plainly in the bright moonlight. Jennie, darkly veiled, wrapped in a long travelling-coat, was sitting alone far back in the vehicle. Helmyng jumped out of his own battered landau and stopped hers:—

"Where are you going?"

"To London. I can't stay at Franton. It's impossible. I cannot go to Miss Leddle's."

"Then come to my mother."

He opened the carriage door, sat down by her side, and told the man to drive on to the station. His own fly followed.

"I felt that you would need your purse," he said: "something made me come at once."

"I had a little money—not much—in my jewel-box."

"You will come to my mother?"

"I didn't think of it; but for this one night I'll be grateful if she can take me. I met Gerald after you had gone. We had to speak. . . . It is really all at an end. . . . He's dining there. He's with

Rachel. They are engaged. . . . When I said good-bye to her she kissed me and she cried. We said nothing. She understands." The poor girl spoke in gasps. "It's over now. Thank God, it's over ! I'm glad I saw him once more. It made my feeling quite clear to me."

The wheels knocked against a heavy stone, and she was thrown by the jolt against Helmyng's arm. The blood rushed from his heart to his head. He ceased to think ; but her words,—“It made my feeling quite clear to me,” seemed just the something he had been waiting for. And, as he had no words of his own, his mother's story came back to him : “*I suppose you know that I've got to look out for you.*” He repeated them aloud—unconsciously, with no premeditation, or before he could even consider their effect.

Jennie smiled, because the omen of the straws on her flounce had proved true, and Helmyng had spoken at the one moment which he himself would never have chosen had Destiny not driven him to speak.

They said nothing, and they did not move till the fly stopped at the station. He helped her out, bought her ticket, and watched her boxes being labelled. They got seats in a crowded compartment full of excursionists who chatted, sang songs, and devoured buns and fruit.

But the two idealists gazed together at as much as they could see of the magnificent starry sky through the railway-carriage window.



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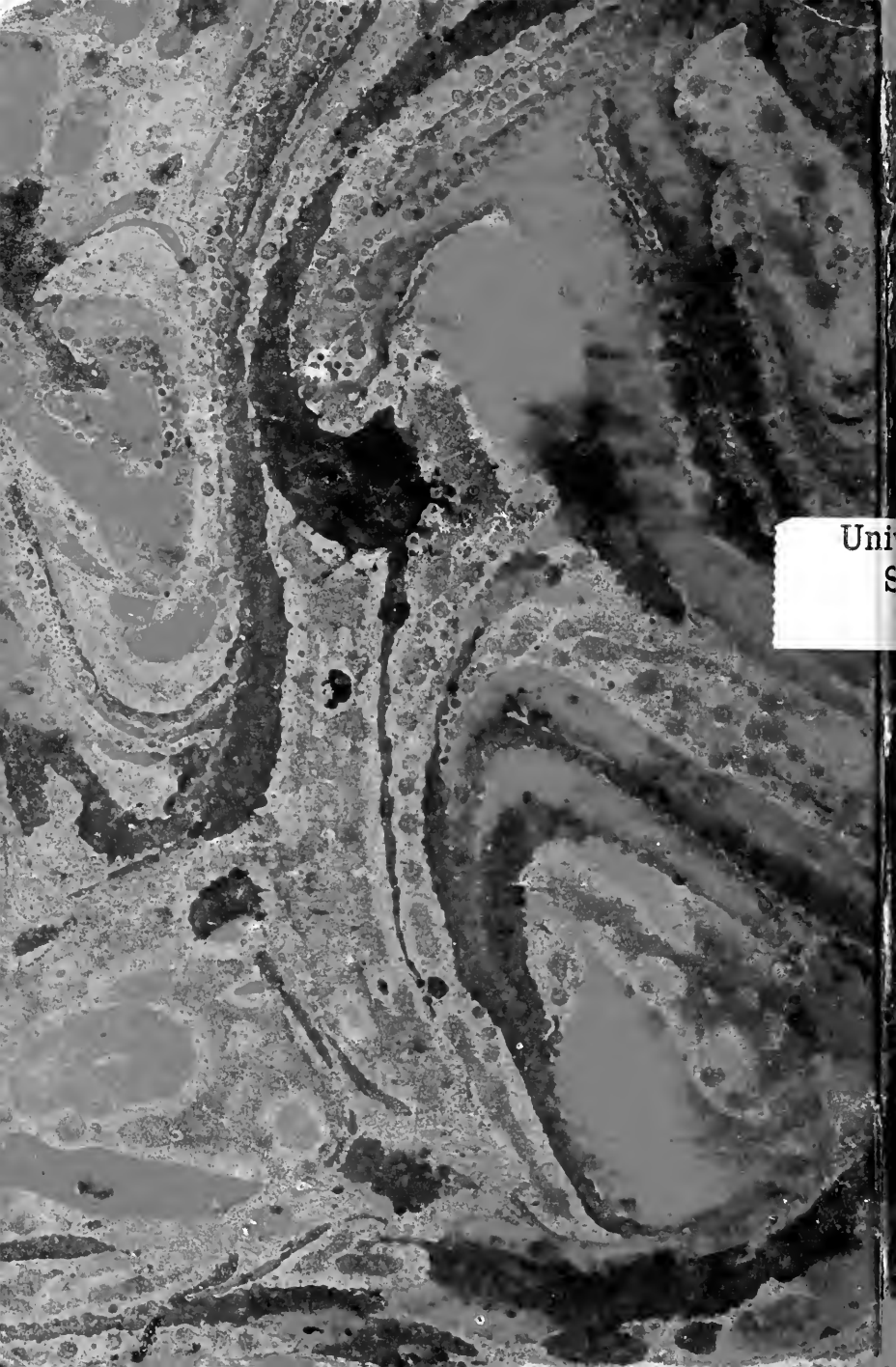


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